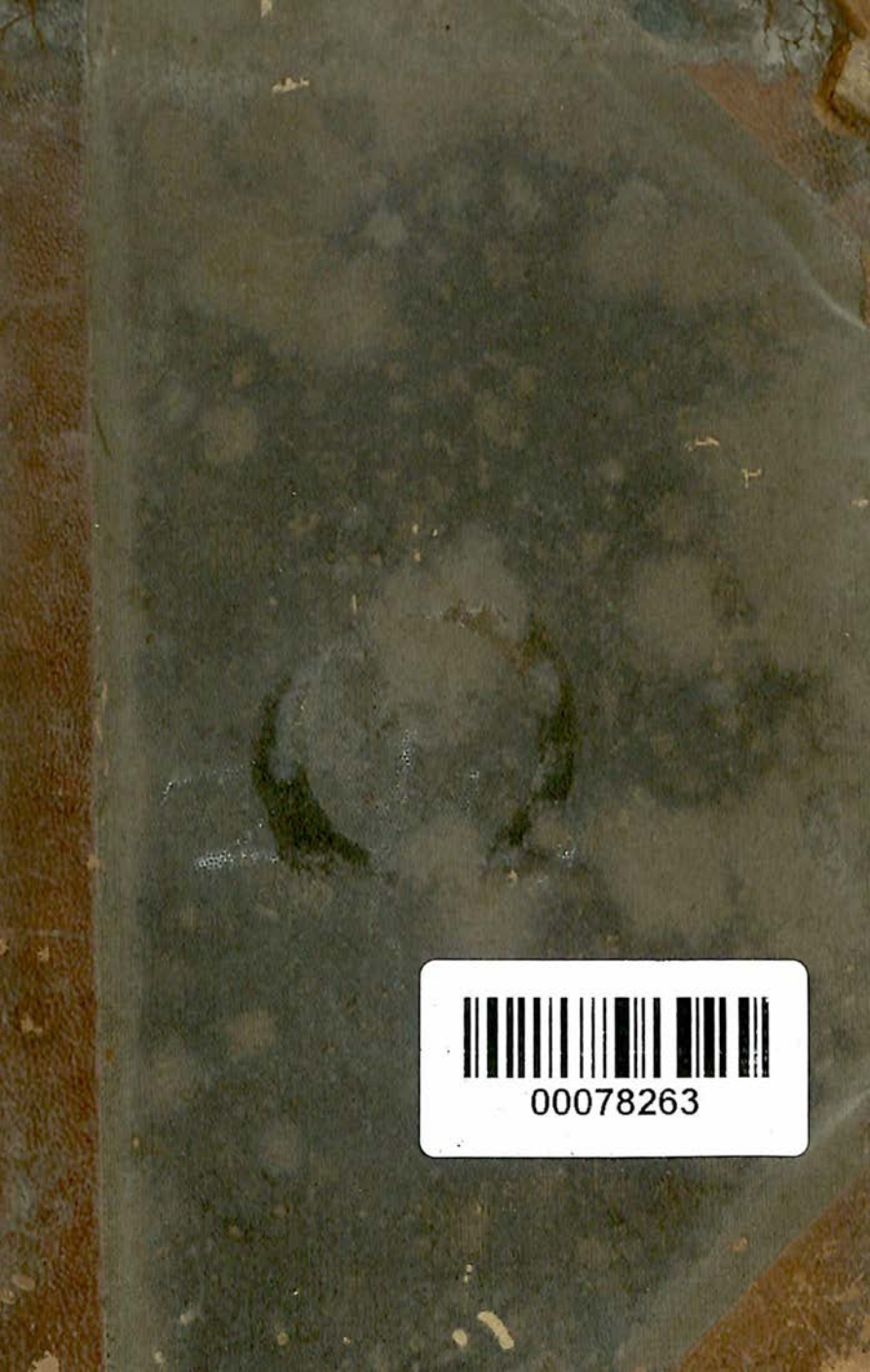
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FORTUNE'S FOOL

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

AUTHOR OF 'DUST' 'GARTH' 'ELLICE QUENTIN' ETC.

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FORTUNE'S FOOL.

Part I.—ADVERSITY.

CHAPTER I.

Of New England forests; and the nature of true independence; with some account of the Witch's Head, of the troglodyte, and of the philosophy of trusting to luck.

Forty years ago there were more trees than anything else in the northern part of New England. A wild, rough-haired forest grasped the rocky soil with lusty roots, and, fertilising itself with its own decay, seemed to have solved the problem of earthly immortality. It thronged seaward almost to the water's edge, peopled the tallest hills, and silently established itself in the most secret recesses of the valleys: go where you would, the trees trooped on beside you, and were before you at every halting-place, and crowded curiously round you, intrusive, yet unsympathetic. For the savage and limitless woods of the new world are a very different affair from the educated and judicious arborescence of the mother country. The latter groups itself to please you, and each tree, in its full-fed complacency, observes a picturesque courtesy towards the claims of its neighbour; it takes no small pride in its own personality; and, in short, expresses the virtues and vices of civilisation. Not so the republican forest of Vermont and Maine. Here the myriad boles thrust straight aloft, so close together that even after death they still must stand erect, supported by the relentless upgrowth of their living brethren. There is no individuality here, nor mutual consideration, nor separate beauty of character, nor rank, nor precedence; but each tall barbarian identifies himself with his swarthy-limbed comrade, till all together feel as one, and the jaunty tossing of their feathery tops is like the rolling of a homogeneous sea. Civilisation, except it carry an axe with it, soon goes mad in such companionship as this; a man must have within him a wildness answering to the wildness of the forest; otherwise it destroys him, or he it. There is immensity without

variety, and repetition without regularity; there is nothing in nature so untamable as a forest tree; nor is it easy for the sophisticated human being to sympathise with an existence which can afford to spend a thousand years in waving an undistinguished plume of leaves towards the sky. Life without personal distinction appears almost inconceivably terrible to our dapper churchmen and agnostics, who must needs have their characters appreciated and their exploits recognised, be the same good or bad, wise or otherwise; independence, for them, meaning that sort of private self-sufficiency which, by setting up each man for himself, renders him abjectly dependent upon the envy or eulogy of all other men. But the forest of New England, which preaches the novel and as yet unpopular doctrine of independence based upon natural identity—a strictly impersonal independence, not only compatible with, but inseparable from, the completest private humility and self-effacement—this forest is a thing which the European moralist either shuns or chops down.

In one of the seaward gorges of the rocky coast there existed, at the time of which I write, a remarkable boulder, known as the Witch's Head. It was one of those natural phenomena called loggan stones—an egg-shaped mass of granite some seven yards in diameter, so nicely poised upon a small pyramidal pedestal or base, that a slight impulse would set it rocking. How it came to occupy its position was an enigma which, to the unscientific mind, invested it with a semi-supernatural importance. The Indians, in bygone times, were known to have made it the scene of their pagan rites and observances; and later, when the mysterious curse of witchcraft fell upon New England, the human subjects of the Black Man were believed to hold their Sabbath revels there. Nor was the stone an insensible or inactive participant in these transactions. It answered the questions of the soothsayers with a titanic nod, thus dignifiedly forestalling the antics of the spiritualised mahogany of our own day; and there was a tradition afloat that it had revealed the guilt of a malefactor by trembling at the touch of his hand. At all events the Witch's Head was, and remained, until comparatively recent times, a celebrated and formidable object: a thing which people did not care to visit by moonlight, or alone; and which served, even in its decadence, as a handy helper to nurses of refractory children. To be threatened with a shake of the Witch's Head would give pause to the most unorthodox urchin in Suncook. Within living memory, however, the Head never did anything of great and appalling significance but once; and in the doing of that deed it ceased to be a Head and became a mere boulder; as shall be fully explained further on. Be it said, meanwhile, that, apart from its supernatural complexion, it was a rather picturesque and agreeable object. It stood conspicuous and eminent at an angle of a narrow winding ravine, along whose rocky bottom a slim brown brook slipped with glance and gurgle towards the sea. The ravine cleft a crevice through the serried forest, yet not so wide but that the eager trees could span it with

their arms, and bend their heads across it in the breeze. Save in the midst of leafless winter, the sun never had much opportunity to explore the secrets of this gorge; but he peopled it with shadows more beautiful than himself. There was a delicious dewy greenness about it, and a blueness of forget-me-nots, and a twitter of pleased birds, and the innocent cool smell of damp earth and weeds. It was barely a dozen yards across at the top, and it was as deep as it was wide; a long-drawn oasis furrowed out of the arid heart of an American forest. An engineer would have seen in it a useful basis for a road; and in fact a road was wanted just in this place between Suncook and the neighbouring town of Cranmead. But the time for such things was not yet come; and people were more apt to pass between Cranmead and Suncook by a roundabout path over the spur of the hill, than to take the shorter, ruggeder way along the ravine. Possibly the sinister reputation of the Witch's Head may have had something to do with this avoidance. Viewed from below, the great stone must certainly have looked forbidding; if that nice balance should become a trifle disturbed—if, in other words, the Head should decapitate itself—he who stood underneath would be both dead and buried before he could be sure that an accident had happened. But if you contemplated the stone from some more comfortable standpoint, it assumed a benignant aspect. Its surface was painted with the sober hues of lichens, and hundreds of crimson and yellow columbines —jolliest of woodland wild flowers—grew in the cracks and hollows of the rock. Round its brow might still be discerned the traces of an ancient Indian inscription—a rude sort of hieroglyphics, the key to which has been lost for centuries. The stone could be ascended from a certain direction, and once mounted on the top of it, you could rock there all day with a long, pendulum-like motion, always running on the verge of disaster but never passing it. The motion, when one had got accustomed to it, is said to have been very pleasant; but it was a pleasure which few persons in the vicinity had ventured to indulge themselves with. The stone was unlucky; it had a bad name; it was stained with blood very likely; and, at any rate, it was an outlandish affair which no one could explain the sense of. Consequently, all God-fearing people, and those who were of opinion that there was trouble enough in the world without going in search of more, gave the Witch's Head a wide berth. Nevertheless, during several years previous to the opening of this history, the Head had not lacked a human companion, both by night and by day; a solitary human being, who had his abode in the Head's very jaws as it were, who enjoyed himself unaffectedly, and who was neither an Indian nor a misanthropist, nor hardly even an outlaw. There will be more to tell about him presently. The abode alluded to was a cave in the face of the cliff immediately behind the head. The entrance to it was narrow, and was partly concealed by the landward limb of the stone itself, and partly by the hanging roots of a tree growing in the bank above. Within, however, it opened out to unexpected dimen-

sions, affording easy enough accommodations for a bachelor—one, that is, whose soul had never aspired to the level of blue china, but was content with shelter, dryness, and an even temperature. The ground plan of this little cavern was like an irregular cross, the head lying towards the entrance; the right arm containing the mattress of sweet-fern; the left arm the fireplace; while the deep recess inward was used as the store-room. The floor was strewn with white sea-sand, the inequalities being filled in or levelled down; the walls and ceiling were of granite, sparkling with black facets of mica: and the height was such that a tall man could have stood erect in the central part, though elsewhere he must stoop or go on all fours. Through the rock above the fireplace was a chimney, which, though nothing more than a natural aperture, had the more than civilised qualities of drawing well and never smoking. Besides a store of dried provisions and some simple but effective cooking utensils, the cave contained a bow and arrows, evidently of Indian make; a coil of fishing tackle both for sea and river; a pair of snow shoes, and a banjo. The latter instrument was kept in a woollen case, and, although rudely framed and somewhat clumsy in appearance, it could discourse excellent music when rightly entreated. Altogether, this cave, which had been discovered by the occupant of it, and which he had never shared with anybody else, was as serviceable and handsome a dwelling as many a more pretentious affair of planks and shingles in Suncook; and if seclusion were an object, the barrier which superstition had raised around the spot was more secure than any thickset hedge, or picket fence, and far more easily kept in repair.

The Witch's Head was situated about half a mile north-west from the outermost house of Suncook village; the ravine in which it stood taking a southerly turn just before leaving the woods, and sending the brook to join the sea on the western side of the long headland, on the eastern side whereof lies Suncook village and bay. The place was originally a fishing settlement of minor importance; though with a special reputation for hard swearing and deep drinking. In course of time some of the worst people died, others took to farming; a small church was built, and a parson got to preach in it; the women became more respectable, and the children more numerous: at last Suncook was esteemed as pious a spot as it had heretofore been ungodly. A school was started, and the schoolboys were strictly looked after and soundly birched. Something was done towards making the fishery business a regular and remunerative industry; and citizens came to be esteemed or otherwise according to their practical usefulness to the community. It was at about this time that the cave behind the Witch's Head found a tenant: since no community is so small but that some member of it will rebel, either secretly or openly, against practical usefulness in any form. The troglodyte in question was duly excommunicated by the Selectmen, the schoolmaster and the minister, but was ardently admired and envied by the not inconsiderable number of those who would have

liked to follow his example, if they had not liked still better the maintenance of their social repute. One avowed challenger of orthodoxy and convention serves as safety-valve to a score of reticent malcontents, who imaginatively make his attitude their own, while actually wearing starched collars and listening to the safety-valve's damnation from the Sunday pulpiteer. It is a mistake to suppose that examples of lawlessness are necessarily contagious. To the interior man they may be so; but the external man is by them enabled to wear the more easily his armour of demure smugness. To be led is more comfortable than to lead, and involves less moral responsibility; in fact, leadership always costs a certain amount of social respectability. As touching the troglodyte of Witch's Head, he cannot, perhaps, be said to have merited the title of leader, at any period of his career. He regarded his life as an opportunity for independent experiment, and would have counted it loss of time to avail himself of the experience of other people. He neither laid down nor observed any set rules of conduct, but swam free in the current of existence, and trusted less to himself than to luck for the realisation of his desires. Looking upon himself as a version of human nature, he gave great weight to the human nature, and attached very slight importance to the version; in other words, he delighted in himself as a man, but seldom enjoyed himself as a person. One consequence of this was, an aversion from attempting to shape his individual destiny in accordance with the dictates of intellectual prudence: it seemed happier to believe that the general set of human affairs was towards improvement; and that inasmuch as the welfare of the many had always been consistent with the suffering of the few, he would be a fool who should presume by his own efforts to identify himself with either one party or the other, or even to decide what was misfortune, and what was the reverse. But it is doing injustice to this modest troglodyte to represent him as entertaining theories, or, indeed, views of any kind. We may deduce his philosophy from his history; but he himself could have given no account of it. To the end of his life there was a deep fund of boyishness in him, and at the period of his life with which we are at present concerned, he was in years as well as in disposition a boy. But this subject demands another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

A hermit who was neither a misanthropist nor a philosopher. A lesson in the art of magic: a banjo: a portrait in oils: and an unaccountable old Frenchman.

It was a warm day in June, and the troglodyte, not dressed much to speak of, was lying on his stomach on the crown of the Witch's

Head. He lacked both hat and shoes; and from the free spread of his sunburnt toes and the riotous betanglement of his brown hair, it might have been inferred that he dispensed altogether with such appliances. But boys who live above the fortieth parallel of north latitude learn betimes that the power of frost is not mechanical merely, but also opens the way to moral and intellectual culture. By nipping this urchin's ears and toes, for example, it cultivated his mind up to the level of felt and leather—a feat which would probably have transcended the unassisted capacity of the local board of education. It is but fair to remark, on the other hand, that if he went shod and bonneted only upon compulsion of winter, he wore jacket and breeches all the year round of his own free will. Though he knew little as yet of the refining influences of the hairbrush and the Bible; though he was as shy, and in some respects as untamed, as the squirrels in the tree over his head; and though he was quite unversed in the Teufelsdroeck philosophy; nevertheless he drew the line—and drew it instinctively—this side sans culottism. He might live as wildly as the squirrels, but there was blood in his veins which prevented him from limiting himself to squirrel's views.

Misanthropic he certainly was not; but his desire at present was towards solitude, and his human intimates were few. As a general thing, healthy boys avoid mankind, as being a form of creation too much cut-and-dried, too sophisticated, and too opinionated to be of much use. They find better company and entertainment in the face of nature and in animals. In truth, the man could afford the boy all that nature and animals can, if only he would show him his manhood instead of himself. But that is not to be expected: and so the boy holds back until he has become cut-and-dried, and all the rest of it, in his turn. The boy we are speaking of affected the society of the woods, the streams, and the ocean, because these let him have his way; or if they constrained him it was not captiously, nor without due warning. Man—that is the particular men and women whom he knew—presented themselves to his mind in the light of a *coterie* opposed to his freedom of action. He may or may not have been aware that America is the land of liberty; but he had discovered for himself that to appropriate Farmer Bunker's water-melons, and even to make faces at Widow Klench, were liberties which carried a penalty. Now, since the sea never punished him for catching its fish, nor the forest for capturing its game, it was clear to this boy that nature was more enlightened than mankind, and less fussy.

Sprawling there in the chequered sunshine on the granite boulder, which swung slowly to and fro in response to the impulse which he occasionally gave it, the boy was probably as happy as a creature who is more than an animal can afford to be. His five senses were all in good order, and he needed neither reminiscence nor anticipation to fortify his felicity. He possessed a perhaps exceptional capacity for the discovery and enjoyment of natural loveliness—not taking it indiscriminately for granted, as most boys do. For all animals (ex-

cept bats, which curdled him with helpless horror) he had a curious and inexhaustible affection, and pondered over their ways and movements with an intensity of observation truly flattering to the objects of it; and they in turn took him largely into their confidence. He tamed many of them; but the taming was always incidental, so to say, to the acquaintance: he never interfered in any way with their liberty, except upon occasion to kill and eat one of them. His hunting implements have been already referred to; he had no firearms, but his bow answered all purposes as far as raccoons, squirrels, ducks, and partridges were concerned; and several times he had killed deer; and once he had mortally wounded a bear by an arrow through its eye. As for fishing, the brook that gurgled beneath him had trout enough, and there were salmon and pickerel in the lake above; but he liked better to take a fisherman's dory and scull out beyond the cape, and there haul in great cod and haddock, or cast a flying hook into a shoal of mackerel. The sea entered so deeply into his conception of existence, that up to his fourteenth year (of which period I am treating) he had never considered the possibility of a life away from it; and geography figured itself to him as a continual seacoast. Ships sailed away with his imagination, and never stopped short of Eldorado; some day he contemplated an actual voyage thither; but thus far he had not sufficiently digested the idea of travel to do more than wonder about it. The magnitude of the earth and its rotundity are not among the intuitions of the uninstructed mind: but to remain where you are comfortable, is so. And this boy was, upon the whole, remarkably comfortable.

He had no very vivid recollection of ever having been otherwise. Even before his discovery and occupation of the cave, now some five years ago, he had been as well off as most boys seem to be. All the boys he knew either had, or had had, fathers and mothers; he had never had either, so far as he was aware; and observation disposed him to the belief that one was better without them. The fathers and mothers of Suncook, at all events, appeared to be persons of a uniformly arbitrary and despotic disposition. His own domestic experiences had not been of a complex nature. He could bring before his mind a picture of a brown old room, with a smoky ceiling, and dusty windows: the backs of books emerging from the gloom of an alcove; a table heaped up with learned disorder; and in front of it the low-seated, leather-covered arm-chair, with the white-haired, black-eyed old man in it. This aged, but astute and nervous countenance was among the very earliest apparitions in the boy's memory; and there was a sense of its having sometimes stood between him and the oppression of the outside world. It was a face which exercised influence and power; and the boy had never doubted its ability to hold its own in spite of any odds. He addressed it as Monsieur Jacques; and it called him Jacques; or Jack when there was occasion for severity. Their conversation was generally carried on in French; but Jack in time came to understand English; and then, if

he wished to enrage M. Jacques, he had only to speak to him in that language. What might be the relation between this effect and its cause, Jack never could understand; the less so, inasmuch as scarcely anybody besides himself in Suncook could speak French at all, and M. Jacques (or Mossy Jakes, as the village tongue translated it) never got angry at anybody else's English. This led him to suspect that there was some special tie uniting him to M. Jacques, a notion which was strengthened by the fact that they lived in the same house, and ate their dinner in company, and was further confirmed by the strange tenderness which M. Jacques sometimes betrayed towards him—a tenderness very different from the careless or capricious goodwill of other people. But when, one day, it occurred to Jack to settle the question by asking it, the old gentleman burst out in a shrill, angry laugh, and exclaimed with a kind of fury, 'You? You are nobody—you are nothing! You belong to nobody! You are from the mud! Speak no more of it!' Whereupon Jack gazed at his antique companion with a certain grave curiosity, and allowed the subject to drop. After all, he could not see that it was a matter of any consequence. He was that which he was, and no information as to how he became so could make much difference to him.

It was an odd comradeship, therefore, which subsisted between the recluse of the arm-chair and him of the cave, and not the least singular feature in it was, that it never ripened—or degenerated—into familiarity. Though the old Frenchman's roof had sheltered the child in infancy, and though, at all times, his board and hearth had been free to him as to no other, yet whether from constitutional reserve, or for some deeper reason, the senior constantly refrained from discussing any personal affairs with the boy. Neither was it his cue to attempt what is called the formation of the youngster's mind: on the contrary, he often took occasion to draw him out—testing him, as it were, for this or that quality; and albeit his face or voice would sometimes express gratification or the contrary, he never explicitly commended the good or reproved the evil. This omission was no more due to mental inaptitude on the boy's part than to mere carlessness on the part of the man: and the result, of course, was to keep the two in a manner estranged from each other, although such relations as there were between them were easy and amicable enough.

Jack, indeed, felt no more constraint in Mossy Jakes's presence than in that of a woodchuck or a water-melon; he even went so far as to deem the Frenchman the better company, when the story-telling vein was active in him. For Mossy Jakes had a store of marvellous tales in his head, to which, on winter evenings, it was Jack's dear delight to listen. Quaint histories were those that fell from the old gentleman's lips; and the listener, curled up on the warm hearth, beheld the scenes described in the wreaths of tobacco-smoke which circled upwards from the bowl of the narrator's long-stemmed pipe. Immersed in this world of imagination he forgot the presence of narrow and dusky walls, and the low ceiling grew to a loftier vastness than

the sky itself. He thought the stories more real and reasonable than were the circumstances of his own palpable existence; the latter being lifeless fact, while the former were vivified by the electric and forming touch of art and fancy. The storyteller enjoyed them too; in thus giving rein to his invention he requited himself for who shall say how much rigid self-repression and literalness; and perchance under the guise of allegory and fable, he sometimes ventured to relieve his soul by alluding to persons and events whose actuality had made him the unknown refugee and alien that he was.

These stories, together with the conversation which they elicited, formed a large part of Jack's education. He would not go to school, and Mossy Jakes, when interviewed by the school board on the subject, supported the boy in his refusal; but Jack's escape was less complete than he imagined. The word 'school' was banished, but it is to be feared that the thing itself was not seldom present under a specious disguise. For example, Jack had given forth that nothing should induce him to learn to read. His conception of reading, it should be observed, was to stand up on the schoolroom floor, between a gang of jibing schoolmates behind, and a scowling and birch-brandishing schoolmaster in front, and there to emit a variety of incoherent and inharmonious sounds called the alphabet. Jack had seen this ceremony performed on one occasion (himself unseen), and returning to M. Jacques's study afterwards he announced the determination above mentioned.

It was a December evening, and there was an ardent crackling and oozing of hemlock logs on the hearth. The boy, as his custom was, lay on the floor in front of the blaze, which warmed his back pleasantly through his deer-skin shirt and leggings. His eyes were fixed upon his host: the ruddy firelight (there was no lamp lighted) brought into prominent relief the high features of the Frenchman's wrinkled physiognomy, flickering brightly upon the point of his long chin and the arched ridge of his nose, and reflecting red sparkles from his black eyes. Fitfully discernible in the background were the heavy cabinet of dark wood, with its brass knobs and hinges, and its sombre-covered books; on the shelf below, the dusty jar of drugs and chemicals, and the grotesque forms of retorts and crucibles; and above, the tarnished frame of an inscrutable oil-portrait. Mossy Jakes turned to the cabinet and took a volume from it.

'Do you know what that is?' he inquired in French.

'It is a book!' replied Jack, with a gesture of aversion.

'You do not understand what you say,' was the Frenchman's answer. 'You are thinking of a spelling-book. But this is nothing of that kind. It is—a thing which tells stories!'

He leaned forward in saying the last words, and pronounced them in a mysterious whisper, with a quick raising and lowering of his thick eyebrows.

Jack gazed penetratingly at the man and at the thing he held in his hand. At last he said, 'Whatever tells stories must be alive.'

'Very good! Then I tell you that this is alive, and has been alive three or four times as long as I have. And it has told its stories, day and night, without stopping, ever since the beginning. It is telling them at this moment. . . . Listen!'

There was a dead silence for about a minute, during which the boy sat erect, with his eyes upon the magic volume, and his hand to his ear.

'I can hear nothing,' he murmured at length, 'except the crackling of the hemlocks, and a thumping inside of me.'

'Ha! look—it was not open—that was the difficulty!' the Frenchman exclaimed. 'Its voice was smothered. But now that I have opened it—ah! now you can hear it—listen again!'

Jack listened till he might have heard the snow falling into the sea; but nothing came of it. 'Can you hear it? you yourself, M. Jacques?' he demanded.

'Without doubt! I hear it very plainly. But it is necessary to keep one's regard fixed upon the page—thus. It speaks, but not altogether as we do. The stories pass through your eyes before they reach your ears—do you comprehend?'

'To hear with your eyes is the same as to see,' returned the youngster after a pause.

The elder wrinkled his cheeks and pressed his lips together for a moment. 'Humph! you would as well say that to see with your ears is the same as to hear,' was his rejoinder. 'Well, be it so; to hear and to see are in a manner the same. Now hear this story.' He held the open book before the boy's face.

'Let me hold it in my hands. Now, Monsieur Jacques, you are very sure that you can hear the story yourself?' The old man nodded. 'Then,' continued the other, 'so can I also!' And he set to work.

He began by applying the open pages to his ear, occasionally giving the volume a shake, by way of setting its machinery in motion. But nothing was extracted by this treatment. He placed the book on the floor and lay down to it with his head supported between his hands, and tried the effect of a persistent and unwavering stare, at the same time stimulating his imagination to enormous efforts; but his exertions were in vain. 'If you can hear what it says,' he exclaimed at length, looking up at M. Jacques with a flushed countenance, 'tell me a little, and that will perhaps help me.'

'Willingly,' the Frenchman replied, taking his pipe from between his teeth, and pointing with the long stem to the top line of the page. 'Listen to what this is saying: *Of the behaviour of the Robbers to the Lady. Of the great design which Gil Blas projected, and its issue.*'

'How could you tell?' demanded Jack, now greatly excited. 'I was nearer to it than you were, and yet I heard nothing.'

'The truth is, my little Jacques,' answered the other, resuming his pipe and speaking in a kindly tone, 'this world is full of magic and mysteries; and all men are either enchanters or fools. The enchanters

make the spells, and control the world by understanding it; they are rich and fortunate, and hear and see beauty where the fools are blind and deaf. Nothing is anything until you know its secret; and as for this storyteller which you hold in your hand, you will never hear it until you have found out the secret of how it talks. The words which I repeated about the Robbers and Gil Blas—you know how they sound; but that is the way the sound looks when you can see it. Those little black marks are words which an enchanter has forced to become visible; and if you know his spell, you can disenchant them, and they will speak to you.'

'But you know the secret—you can tell it me?' said Jack, with painful earnestness.

'My faith, but the secret is a very long one, look you; it will take many days to reveal itself: perhaps even some months. I have other things to do: and you—you do not really wish to know it. It is as difficult as to learn how to read!'

'But it is not difficult in the same way,' persisted the eager Jack. 'And rather than not know it, I would learn how to read also!'

'Well, well,' returned the elder, blowing a thick cloud from his pipe and crossing his thin legs, 'the secret will be enough for the present; especially since those who know it seldom need to learn reading afterwards. To-morrow morning, then, we will begin.'

Jack felt that a great concession had been made to him: the revelation of the mystery began the next day, and before the end of the winter it was a mystery to him no more. And from the start to the finish he never once harboured a suspicion of whither his conductor was leading him. Men are, to some extent, ruled by names. Unquestionably Jack owed a good deal to their judicious administration.

But it is by no means necessary to follow the footsteps that he made in the direction of learning; very irregular and eccentric footsteps they for the most part were. No school curriculum that ever was devised could have taught Jack the things he learnt from the old Frenchman; nor, on the other hand, did the latter care to instruct him in the technicalities of schools. He let the boy's inclinations declare themselves, and then put them in the way of being fulfilled; but at all times he acted more as a commentator than as a pedagogue. It was a dogma of his that no one could know anything which he had not taught himself of his own free will. All the teacher's duty was comprised in affording the learner an explanatory catalogue of subjects, and certain practical suggestions.

Allusion has been made to a banjo. It was one of the first of Jack's acknowledged possessions; but it was given to him, not by M. Jacques, but by the negro cook and housemaid, Deborah. Deb was a waif of slavery; she had lived in New Orleans; and it was probably owing to her consequent knowledge of French that she had obtained her footing in M. Jacques's household. She was a broad-beamed and portly negress, fastidiously cleanly, and fond of veracity, elementary colours, and

music. Her turban was crimson, her scarf yellow, her petticoat blue; she never excused an untruth or told one; and in her leisure moments, which were not few, she sat on a three-legged stool before the kitchen fire, and thrummed on her banjo, which she had brought all the way from New Orleans, and which had formerly belonged to her ole man Jim, who had been sold away from her. An excellent instrument it was, though not expressed in fancy; and Deb valued it above everything belonging to her. But one day Jack got hold of it in Deborah's absence, and in the course of an hour or two had picked out some bars of a tune by the light of nature. Deborah, returning unheard, beheld the ravisher from the kitchen threshold; but her first stern impulse to deal summarily with him was disarmed as she listened to his performance. The end of it was that the banjo was placed at his service; he had found out its secret, and thus obtained rights over it; and certainly he elicited such melodies from it as poor Deborah had not suspected it of containing. Now, this banjo was destined to bring about an important modification in Jack's life; and the way it happened was this. The boy had taken it into the study one morning (Mossy Jakes being away on the headland, according to a custom of his, at certain hours of the day), and was amusing himself with trying to catch an air which had long been hovering in his head, come from he knew not whence. After many attempts, at last he got firm hold upon it, and it was at this moment of success that M. Jacques opened the door and came into the room. His face wore a look of strange alarm or agitation, and he glanced nervously from the boy to the murky portrait on the wall.

'What was it, Jack?' he stammered, 'what was it that I heard? What have you done?'

'Be silent and you shall hear,' replied Jack, flushed by the muse; and he began to play the air, singing to it without articulate words, as his general habit was. But before he had finished, the old Frenchman, who had sat down heavily in his chair, hoarsely called upon him to stop.

'Now tell me, Jack,' he said, in a harsh but tremulous voice, 'from whom did you learn that? That is not one of Deborah's tunes: who taught it to you?'

'It is my own,' replied the musician confidently. 'I learnt it from myself. No one ever knew it before me. Listen to the rest of it. I like it the best of all.'

But for some reason or other, M. Jacques would not listen: on the contrary, he fell into one of his incomprehensible rages, and cast at the astonished boy a shrill torrent of threats and abuse. Jack did not know what he meant: and nothing in what he said led him to connect the Frenchman's outburst with the air which he himself had just invented. At last he became indignant.

'I don't know who first brought me here,' he said, in answer to some of M. Jacques's concluding objurgations; 'but if I had been asked, I would not have come. At any rate, now I can go away! I

don't care if I'm not a Frenchman; they are no better than other people. If Frenchmen are all as old and cross as you are, I hope I never shall be one. Good-bye; I am going away, and I never shall come back!' Jack gave so eloquent an intonation to the word 'never' that he melted with self-pity, and tears came into his eyes. Nevertheless, he tucked his banjo under his arm, and went to the door.

'Wait a moment!' said Mossy Jakes, in a breathless voice. He partly rose from his chair, and his face worked as if under the influence of a vivid impulse; but after a little he sank back again, and his expression darkened. He appeared, in this short space of time, to have formed and abandoned an important purpose.

'No! I claim no right to control you,' he said, with a wave of his hand, and showing his set teeth between his lips. 'You exist, and I accept your existence; no more!—Bah! a child, and I talk to him as if he were a man!' he went on to himself, in a muttering tone. 'He is in the right, after all: I should not be like this if he were—any one! But why should I care if he goes? . . . yet even then it would be folly to lose sight of him. I am a fool, however; I have been fooled from the beginning!—Monsieur Jack,' he continued, now addressing himself again to the boy, 'you may do just as you please; but if you decide not to put an end to our acquaintance, I shall hold it an obligation. It was, perhaps, a mutual misfortune that we ever encountered each other; but perhaps a separation would not be the way to remedy it.—Ah, my little Jacques!' he cried again, abandoning his formal manner, and holding out his arms imploringly to the boy, 'I love thee, my child: I love thee and I hate thee: I hate thee because I must love thee. You do not know whose portrait that is, there? No . . . and yet that song was not yours, unless the dead live . . . Bah! I talk nonsense, and thou dost not comprehend me. Stay, then, my little Jacques; only promise never to sing like that again!'

For the time, Jack stayed; but this affair, combined with several others, kept the notion of an independent habitation before his mind; and when, a week or two later, he made the opportune discovery of the cave, he hesitated no longer. Here he could live undisturbed and free, and yet be within visiting distance of Mossy Jakes and Deborah. The cave, moreover, must unquestionably have been meant by destiny for his special and sole accommodation. For as he had sat one day upon the Witch's Head, meditating upon the inscrutable oil-portrait, whether it were a man or a woman, and poking meanwhile with the end of his fishing-pole at a small black crevice in the face of the adjoining cliff, all of a sudden a fragment of rock gave way, and his rod slipped through into a hollow which was evidently of considerable extent. Jack had read enough about enchanted caverns to feel that this was a discovery worthy of any hero of romance. With no great difficulty he broke down enough of the wall to admit of his getting through the aperture: he carried flint and steel at his belt, and with the aid of these and a twist of dry grass he had very soon explored

the cave. There was no enchantment about it, apparently, except that legitimate enchantment which invests a new and useful discovery. Here he would be absolutely safe from intrusion; the Witch's Head, standing just before his door, would be a better guardian than a dozen watch-dogs, and would, moreover, never be absent from its post. So there he established himself, banjo and all; and for a long time no one knew whither he had betaken himself, though he appeared in the village nearly every day. He was never much disturbed, even by the Selectmen, who contented themselves with pointing him out to their sons as a frightful example of all that misbecame a boy: the sons meanwhile regarding him with a secret and guilty admiration. When it became known (as in course of time it did) that his habitation was in the neighbourhood of the Witch's Head, this admiration developed into a still more awful sentiment: what a hero this Jack must be, not to be afraid to spend the night in the haunted ravine! and what a formidable distinction to be occasionally prayed for in church, and never to be present to hear the prayer! Verily the good things of this world were, in the judgment of the youth of Suncook, unequally divided.

But as years passed by, and Jack grew older, he began to question within himself whether life might not contain something more than had as yet been revealed to him. The Indians who occasionally visited the district, and with whom his relations were of a friendly and even confidential character, disclosed to him tempting glimpses of a world beyond his world: and the vessels which tacked in the offing, or came to anchor in the bay, offered another and not less alluring avenue to adventure and change. The solitary hours which he spent singing to his banjo on the Witch's Head, made him in some way aware of impulses and emotions which his surroundings did not afford the means to gratify. Besides, his privacy was no longer so inviolate as formerly it had been. The prestige of his eccentricity had begun to wane, and his old enemies the Selectmen had resolved in full meeting that Jack's morally unregenerate and physically barbarous mode of existence was a scandal to the community, and that measures must be taken to suppress it; and their pious hostility finally became so menacing, that Jack was fain to take thought how he might defend himself in case of attack; and he hit upon a plan which he fancied would be effective, with what reason may hereafter appear. It was at this epoch of his history that we find him enjoying the June warmth on the crown of the Witch's Head, as described at the beginning of this chapter.

CHAPTER III.

A clerical visitor: with illustrations of how a man becomes learned by asking questions: and of the proverbial truth that the loss of the donkey that dies abroad comes home.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon; a period of the day in which there is very little noise. The birds were for the most part still, though now and then the absurd scream of the blue jay sounded in the distance, or the croak of a hawk circling high in air, with steady wings, and mobile, down-looking head. The babble of the brook was also pleasantly audible, and a minute hum of insects, mad to exhaust their whole lives in one hour of noonday sunshine. Sometimes, moreover, borne on the faint sighs of the south-easterly breeze, a far-off, throbbing roar made itself heard—the mellow utterance of the azure, everlasting sea. It brought pleasant visions of plunging coolness and salt-dripping seaweed into the hot languor of the ravine, and made Jack contemplate the possibility of his being enterprising enough to go down to the shore and have a swim, and perhaps a shot at a sea-gull with his bow and arrow, which lay on the rock beside him.

But while this question was still in mid-argument, something happened which rendered argument superfluous. This was a noise as of the approach of some walking animal, treading heavily down the rocky pathway which skirted the margin of the rivulet. Jack's ears, were trained to distinguish between one kind of tread and another, and it wanted but an instant to convince him that his first wild hope of his visitor's turning out to be a deer, or even a caribou, was baseless. These were the feet of a human being—of one shod with sole-leather, and of one not well-accustomed to such rough going. Having acquainted himself with this much, Jack deemed it prudent to withdraw, crab-like, beneath the shadow and concealment of the bank, where he could see and not be seen. The footsteps were now near at hand; they were the footsteps of his destiny, though he had little suspicion of it. Ostensibly, indeed, they were the footsteps of a rather tall and heavily-built man, dressed in black, and with black whiskers and eyebrows. He was carrying his coat flung across his arm; his black felt hat was pushed to the back of his head, in order that his red, perspiring brow might catch whatever coolness was about; over his shoulder was slung an oblong metal case some nine inches in length; the expression of his strongly-marked features indicated both fatigue and irritation; and, in fact, he was pursued by a couple of gadflies, who swung and whizzed about his head despite all his efforts to drive them away, and who doubtless rendered his life a burden to him. He looked full forty years of age, but he might

have been younger; many of the lines in his visage seemed to tell of a life that had been hard rather than long, and which, long or short, had never known serenity or contentment. There was, also, a disagreeable trace of intentional sanctimoniousness on his countenance as of a man professionally accustomed to transact all his affairs, whether of light or of darkness, behind the screen of a charitable Christian grimace. It was suggestive of pulpits, chasubles, and sermons, and also of simony and humbug; and this clerical flavour was enhanced by the cut and hue of the garments and by the dingy whiteness of his stock. But it would obviously be unjust to pronounce judgment upon a man on the mere testimony of his personal appearance, especially when seen under the disadvantages of heat, dust, and exhaustion. This man evidently belonged to the upper classes of society, and had been familiar with all the ins and outs of good-breeding. If circumstances had made him also familiar with classes and breeding of another kind, it is proper to assume this to have been his misfortune rather than his choice. It was evidently not his choice to be as footsore and uncomfortable as he was at this moment; and from the anxiety of his forward glance, it seemed probable that he had lost his way. Jack scrutinised him narrowly as he approached, and liked him not. He was a stranger in the first place; and his appearance, being thus taken off his guard, was not prepossessing But what was more to the purpose, he was invading Jack's privacy; and as he must be ignorant of the terrors of the Witch's Head, it was upon the cards that he might attempt to penetrate into the cave itself. This, however, he did not do, and in fact he scarcely seemed to remark the great boulder at all. He passed beneath it, and was tramping on with the intention, apparently, of getting to the end of the ravine before halting, when he missed his footing on a slippery stone, and stumbled into the brook. The accident brought him to a standstill, and seemed to suggest to him the propriety of taking his noonday repose. There was a mossy protuberance on the bank of the stream, close at hand, overshadowed by the dense foliage of a butternut-tree, and upon this the gentleman in black seated himself. He then took off his shoes and stockings, thrust his feet into the water, and emitted a grunt of weary satisfaction. He lolled back on his elbow, took off his hat, wiped his forehead, and began to gaze about him. The beauty of the spot seemed to interest him less than the question of its locality; he glanced at the sun, and at the direction and length of the shadows; and consulted a thick silver watch, which he pulled out of a pocket in the waistband of his trousers.

'I must be right after all,' Jack heard him mutter, in the indrawn tone which men sometimes use when alone. Finally he opened the metal case which he carried slung on a strap, and taking therefrom a hunch of bread and meat, he proceeded to eat his luncheon. While doing so, he surveyed his toes in the current with an air of serious meditation; occasionally murmuring to himself, and grimacing, or emitting brief snorts, as of unmirthful laughter. His meal over, he

shut up his case, and getting prone beside the stream, took a long draught of the pure water. From the way in which he shook his head as he arose, Jack fancied that pure water might not be the beverage in which he took most pleasure. He now sat for a time as if undecided whether to pursue his journey at once, or to allow a quiet interval for digestion. The latter was the course which he adopted; and by way of beguiling the time yet more agreeably, he produced a tobacco-pipe and a twist of negrohead, and having shaved off a sufficient quantity of the weed with his penknife, he filled his pipe and began to search for a light. Unfortunately no light was forthcoming.

Now for a confirmed smoker to have made up his mind to smoke, and then, when everything is ready, to be baulked for want of a light, is a severe trial of Christian forbearance, and a most lamentable mishap in itself. The man in black, when he had fully convinced himself that his resources did not include the means of setting his pipe agoing, gave utterance to a phrase often used by clerical gentlemen, albeit with a less particular application. But this apart, the situation demanded a Good Samaritan. Could the backwoods of New England furnish such an article?

The man with the black whiskers evidently thought not; for he put his pipe back in his pocket, and prepared to resume his shoes and stockings.

But Jack's heart was stirred with compassion. Though he did not smoke himself, he was aware from observation how fond some people were of it—Mossy Jakes, for instance; so leaving his bow and arrows where they were, he clambered noiselessly down on the further side of the Witch's Head, and approached the stranger with his flint and steel in his hand.

The stranger looked up, and his expression at first was both suspicious and forbidding; but as Jack drew near, and his proportions and purpose became manifest, the man in black rapidly assumed an affable and inviting demeanour, culminating in a benevolent and wide-mouthed smile.

'You can light your pipe with this,' Jack said,

'That is particularly obliging of you, my little man—particularly kind, upon my word! Yes, a smoke would be highly acceptable: though perhaps it is an indulgence seldom used by men of my cloth. I am a clergyman, by the bye, Mr. Murdoch. Ah, that is really very acceptable—thanks very much. Yes, in this grand country of yours, so primitive still and so beautiful, even we clergymen feel that we may occasionally take a little airing beyond the bounds of propriety—of clerical propriety—ha, ha! But when I am in England—I am an Englishman, as probably you have already discovered—when I am on my native heath, I put the pipe and the tobacco away.'

All this was spoken in a full, luscious voice, with murmurs of sound connecting the sentences. The lilt of the speech was novel to Jack, who, knowing nothing of what is called national accent,

supposed this up-and-down inflection to be peculiar to the reverend gentleman. He had never seen an Englishman before, and the spectacle stimulated his imagination. It seemed charitable to suppose that what appeared offensive and unlovely in him were qualities common to all English people, and that in himself he might be a very charming and excellent person.

'Do you know any Frenchmen?' Jack suddenly inquired.

The clergyman glanced at him quickly, and his eyes travelled over him as though he were taking his measure afresh. Prudent people, who know the world, are shy of answering a question of which they do not see the bearing; and Mr. Murdoch's first impulse was, perhaps, to give a diplomatic reply. But a later impulse modified the first.

'I have had the pleasure of being acquainted with several Frenchmen, my dear boy,' he said. 'But why do you ask?'

'I should like to know if they are all like Mossy Jakes. But you have never seen him, so you could not tell. He is thin, and has white hair.'

'Then I am to understand that Mossy Jakes is a Frenchman?' said Mr. Murdoch, in a slow contemplative tone, with a caressing cadence in it. 'Rather a singular name for a Frenchman, is it not? I don't think I have ever met a Frenchman of that name.'

'His real name is Monsieur Jacques,' Jack explained. 'People in the village call him Mossy Jakes because they don't know how to speak French.'

'Ah, I see! But you, my dear boy, you know how to speak French very well, as I can see by your pronunciation of M. Jacques's name.'

'He and I talk together, and he does not like to have me speak to him in English.'

'Ah, to be sure! And so M. Jacques will be some relative of yours? or connection?—something of that kind, I presume.'

Jack looked somewhat doubtful, and shook his head. The Rev. Mr. Murdoch, possibly mistaking the cause of his silence, tried a new departure.

'I dare say, now, my dear young friend—you must let me call you so, because you did me a kind and unsolicited service, and also because your face and manner have quite won my heart—I dare say you can tell me whether there is a place called Suncook in this vicinity, and in what direction it lies? Suncook, I think, is the name; am I right?'

'You can be there in less than half an hour,' replied Jack. 'Down this gorge is the shortest way, but it is not the way people generally come. The road goes round the hill. That is, if you came from Cranmead.'

'Thanks, very much. Yes, Cranmead was my last halting-place. Let me see—I don't remember meeting your friend M. Jacques in Cranmead.'

'He never goes there. He has always lived in Suncook. His house is the first you see after crossing the ridge. It is the house with the long roof and the big chimney.'

'Ah, of course! And he is not the only French gentleman in Suncook, I dare say.'

'There has never been any other but him,' returned Jack, somewhat resentful of the contrary supposition, as if there could be two M. Jacqueses!

'Dear me, to be sure! How very stupid of me not to have known it. And so you two live in the house together, all by yourselves?'

'Why do you say things that I have not told you?' demanded Jack, feeling a return of his original dislike for this black-whiskered gentleman. 'I do not live with M. Jacques.'

'Now, my dear boy, you must not be impatient with me. How can I help feeling interested in you? What should you say if I told you that I had come all the way from England here on your account? What should you say if I told you that I had known your father——'

'I never had any father, nor any mother,' interrupted Jack, with as much confidence as if spontaneous generation were as commonplace as matrimony. 'And if you come from England, you cannot have come about me; because I never was there, nor any one who knows me.'

The reverend gentleman listened very closely to everything that Jack said; but the conjecture or hypothesis, whatever it might be which he had suddenly formed about the boy, was thwarted and disconcerted by the latter's intrepid ignorance of certain elementary axioms. Simplicity is popularly supposed to lend itself readily to beguilement; but the truth is that a really thoroughgoing simplicity is, as often as not, a match for any cunning. How to get at the origin of a boy who professed to have none? and who, moreover, was disinclined to submit to unlimited questioning. Bribery might succeed in eliciting something; but Mr. Murdoch was not at that moment in possession of good bribing materials. However, as the reverend gentleman scrutinised the cast of Jack's features, the line of his curly hair, and the dark blueness of his eyes; and especially when he noted an odd impatient trick of drawing the eyebrows together when listening to Mr. Murdoch's leisurely and involved speeches; these indications, together with the boy's apparent age, his presence in the vicinity of Suncook, and his knowledge of the French tongue, combined to inspire the clergyman with a reasonable conviction that his long journey over sea and land had not been in vain. Some points yet remained to be cleared up—M. Jacques himself among the rest; but perhaps an application to that gentleman would get more light upon the matter.

'Shall I be likely, do you think,' he inquired, getting to his feet and putting on his hat, 'shall I be likely to find M. Jacques at home at this hour?'

'I don't know whether he will want to see you; he does not generally see any one, unless it is about sickness or quarrelling; but you can try.'

'But if I tell him that .... Floyd .... sent me, he will receive me, will he not?'

In pronouncing this name, which Mr. Murdoch did abruptly and with distinctness, he fastened his gaze narrowly upon Jack's face; but there was no change in the lad's expression to show that he attached any significance to it. 'Did you not tell me your name was Floyd?' pursued the reverend man, appearing to collect his thoughts.

'I did not even tell you that my name is Jack; but I would have told you if you had asked me,' returned the young hermit, with a somewhat contemptuous air. The clergyman had been steadily losing ground with him for several minutes past, and Jack now thought of him as of a timid and unveracious creature, who was incapable of speaking his own mind. Mr. Murdoch, who was by no means wanting in acuteness, divined something of the boy's mental attitude towards him, and made an effort to turn it to his own advantage.

'Come, Jack!' he exclaimed, in a voice which had in it all the elements of heartiness except the coming from the heart, 'I like a frank, straightforward fellow, and I see that you are one. And so you will find I am, when you know me better. Now, I want to do you a great piece of good service. I want to take you with me and show you the world—France, England, and all the rest of it. But in order to do that I must first be quite sure that you are the boy I think you are. You have told me that your name is Jack, and that is very well so far. But everybody, you know, has two names, and sometimes three or more. Now, what are your other names? Is—let me see—is Vivian one of them? or Malgrè? or both?'

'I never heard them. My only name is Jack. M. Jacques calls me Jacques sometimes, but that is the same. I don't want to see the world with you. I mean to see it alone.'

'Ha, ha! bravo! You shall go alone by all means, if you prefer it. But before you start I shall have something to say to you that will do you good to hear. By the way, you have not told me where you live—unless you do live with Mr. Jacques after all—eh, you rogue?—ha, ha!'

'I used to live with him, but now I do not,' returned Jack, not at all entering into the other's genial facetiousness. 'You need not ask me any more questions, for I shall not speak to you again. You laugh and try to look pleasant; but I believe you would like to say "damnation!" as you did just now when you could not light your pipe.'

The Reverend Mr. Murdoch had one failing, which on more than one occasion in his life had stood in the way of his advancement. This was a malignant and violent temper, which was apt to betray itself at inopportune moments. There could scarcely have been a

moment more inopportune than the present one, and of this no one could have been so well aware as Mr. Murdoch himself. Nevertheless —whether it were that something in the boy's tone and bearing recalled to his mind another person against whom he bore a grudge; or whether his patience had been tried beyond endurance by the combination of heat, fatigue, and contradiction—be that as it may, Jack saw the black-browed face suddenly lower and darken, and felt a grasp roughly fastened upon his arm. The boy strove vigorously to wrench himself free; but the clergyman now had got him in both hands, and the clutch was not easily to be shaken off; and Jack, though as lithe and as tough as a panther, felt himself held by a strength greater, if less elastic, than his own. Mr. Murdoch, on the other hand, found the lad so unexpectedly sudden and active in his movements as to render anything beyond holding on to him and squeezing him an impossibility. Thus they stood or staggered, like the old world and the new, with no love lost between them. Jack, who had at first been frightened by the sudden attack, was rapidly becoming angry; and with his anger came courage, and a feeling prompting him to explode his enemy like a charge of powder, and devour the fragments. But a blacker sentiment than this was beginning to uprear its ugly head in the reverend gentleman's heart. His original intention had been merely to give the boy a sound shaking, with perhaps a bang on the side of the head, or a kick in the rear, by way of inculcating better manners. But the resistance he met with kindled another thought; for now there flashed across his mind, as a revelation, yet a revelation for which he had in some way been prepared—what he should do with this boy! Why bother himself any longer to lure him away over seas, or otherwise to sequestrate him where he might for ever escape discovery? Such partial measures were never safe; the old method of Richard the Third of England was the surest. And then, the reverend gentleman would be secure; no more anxieties, no more doubts. And again, what better spot could be selected for the execution of such a piece of business? No eye saw them; here was water—here were rocks and stones. A body found dead in the bed of this rivulet would be thought to have fallen from above, and been stunned and drowned. And as for Mr. Murdoch himself, he would depart up the coast to Newburyport or elsewhere, with clean hands and a good digestion; and M. Jacques might remain uninterrogated.

Such was the revelation of which Mr. Murdoch was the subject—presented not in detail, but with its various elements welded together in one savage mass by the fire of murderous passion. Jack's participation in it was confined to feeling the grasp of his antagonist shift from his arm to his throat. But this, which was intended to expedite matters, had the effect of instantly altering the complexion of the struggle. For Jack, finding his arms free, lost no time in taking his clerical visitor underneath the left thigh, with such effect as to make him lose first his balance and then his hold. The pair swung round and fell with a lamentable thump into the stony-hearted brook; and the

clergyman fell undermost. Before the water which splashed aloft had returned to earth again, Jack had shaken himself loose and sprung to his feet. Without wasting any time, he leaped forward to the Witch's Head, hoisted himself to the top of it, and stood there at bay, bow in hand, and the arrow drawn to the head, and covering Mr. Murdoch's carcase; and the Witch's Head trembled the while, as if in sympathy with the young archer's ire and indignation.

The shock which the clergyman's system had sustained indisposed him to a renewal of the conflict; and it needed not the threat of that uncompromising arrow to make him sue for peace. Indeed, being of gentle blood himself (though by the course of destiny befouled in many a ditch since boyhood), he recognised and respected a kindred dignity in Jack, who had fought not like a clown nor like a savage, but like a gentleman; and who showed his strain by not letting that arrow fly at once, but merely holding it aimed *in terrorem*. So Mr. Murdoch (reflecting likewise that, in the present aspect of affairs, forgiveness was a better policy even than honesty) picked himself tenderly out of the hard-hearted brook, conscious of many contusions, and relieved to find no breakages—and shook his fist at his defiant foe, accompanying the gesture, however, by a forced spasm of cachinnation.

'Huh! huh! huh! you young scapegrace,' blurted the suffering man, 'is this the way you treat gentlemen who come to try a little wrestling with you? Well, I confess myself beaten; and I bear no malice! Come, turn that arrow somewhere else, there's a good fellow, and let me depart in peace. I shan't try to catch you—take my word for it—huh! huh!'

To this Christian appeal Jack made no answer, nor did he cease to cover Mr. Murdoch's figure with his perilously sharp arrow-head, so long as the gentleman remained in sight. The boy was not, by nature, of a savage or revengeful disposition, but this attack had called out whatever was fierce and implacable in his heart. He could never forget it; he did not know how to forgive it. For some time after Mr. Murdoch had disappeared, he stood erect and watchful, with the glow fixed in his cheek, and eyes sharpened and bright. But at last he crouched down, and then threw himself at length upon the rocky brow of the Witch's Head, and gave way to passionate sobs and tears. There was no one to comfort him. The old Frenchman, who had aided him to guess so many secrets, had never hinted a word to him about the secret of his soul.

CHAPTER IV.

'L'histoire d'un homme est donc l'histoire de tous les hommes,' says Alexandre Dumas; 'une épreuve plus ou moins longue, plus ou moins douloureuse! la voix de l'humanité tout entière n'est qu'un long cri.'

THE house in which M. Jacques lived was the oldest house in the village of Suncook. It stood at the south-western extremity of the congregation of dwellings which bore that name. At its landward corner towered an enormous elm-tree, whose lower branches drooped till they swept the roof of weather-blackened shingles. The roof, on that side, descended in a long slope to within eight feet of the ground; on the seaward front it was shorter, giving room for two rows of windows, one above the other. The entrance was at the end, and was ornamented by a gable porch; the house, like most American houses of that epoch, was built of wood throughout, except the foundation, which was of granite; it was clap-boarded, and had been painted red, but was now of a dull mahogany hue. The grass around it was green; at the back was an inclosed garden about an acre in extent, containing a dozen cherry and plum trees, unpruned and ancient, and bearing little fruit. The surrounding wall was built of large round stones taken from the waste land between the house and the sea, piled loosely one upon another. Within, the rooms were low and small, and sparsely furnished; but only two of them—the kitchen and the dining-room—had been entered by any one but the owner of the dwelling since he first took possession—he, and the child who had begun its life there. And even the child had been only partially admitted into the confidence of his sombre birthplace.

It was fourteen years since M. Jacques first made his appearance in Suncook, on a windy evening of March, and so reached the end of a long, wandering, and unhappy journey. It was a journey begun suddenly, in wrath and anguish; and it ended in misery and disaster. Pain may sometimes be relieved by sharing the knowledge of what has given it with some one who has also suffered; but there was not, either in Suncook or in the world, a single human being to whom this old Frenchman could speak of his grief. It lay dungeoned in his own heart, beneath the surface of common life; but it lived there, feeding on the juices that make existence sweet, and turning them to bitterness. M. Jacques was a man of the world before he became a recluse and a misanthrope; he had lived familiarly with men whom all the world knew, and had taken his share in events of which all the world had heard. In his youth he had seen the king's head fall on the guillotine; he had sunk and risen with the rest on the waves of the great storm that taught mankind that licence, the child of despots, is itself of all despots the most terrible; he had lost friends and lands; but through all he had never lost heart, or belief in his fellow men.

But all these trials were in a manner impersonal; the blows which fell on him fell equally on those around him, and he did not grudge the smart. It was another matter when he was called upon to feel a wound aimed at himself only. Says a saturnine humourist of our own day, 'I have considered all the most harrowing and lamentable evils whereof history has given record; there was not one that I could not have endured; the misfortune which actually befell me I found alone insupportable.' M. Jacques, who had forgiven mankind so much, could not forgive the man who did him an injury affecting none outside his own private circle; nay, for that man's sake he hated the whole human brotherhood. To wreak a private revenge for a private wrong he abandoned his country and his career, crossed the ocean, and groped his uncertain and tongue-tied way among an alien and unsympathetic people. He reached his goal too late; and luck thenceforward was a devil to him, not a deity.

Of all this the inhabitants of Suncook knew nothing. The facts, so far as they were acquainted with them, were as follows: On the March evening in question, when it became known that an elderly French gentleman had turned up, it suggested itself to the wisdom of the village fathers that he would be the person to attend to the affair of the French young woman, who was then lying in sore straits at the house of Mistress Dudgeon under the elm. This young woman spoke little or no English, and since, according to Mrs. Dudgeon, who was skilled in such matters, it was quite possible that she did not live through her confinement, it might be as well if some one of her own nationality was in attendance to take down her last utterances. Accordingly, a deputation was selected for the purpose of 'approaching' the French gentleman on the subject. The deputation consisted of three persons, and the spokesman was Silas Bunyan. They found M. Jacques in the kitchen of the place which by courtesy was called the inn, with a plate of fried fish before him. When he understood that the gentlemen wished to speak with him, he arose courteously, bowed, and begged them to be seated. Then there was a pause.

'For what shall I to put the honour of seeing you?' the Frenchman inquired at length, in his halting English.

'Wa'al, sir,' began Silas, smoothing down his right leg, and eying the toe of his cowhide boot with apparent interest, 'I guess you kin talk the French lingo and no mistake—native to it, eh? Wa'al, that's right. Because me and these gentlemen called about that ar French gal what's been stayin' along here for a spell back, and was took bad last night.'

The foreigner's attention was riveted at once, and an expression of dark eagerness entered into his face.

'This lady—how does she call herself?'

'Wa'al, she calls herself Mrs. Floyd,' returned Silas, with a significant emphasis on the verb; 'but there ain't no fixin' the rights of them things, anyway. There's some as thinks she was married over the broomstick, ef she was married at all. Leastways, the fellow

what was with her, he sloped about three months back, and he ain't turned up since; though I'll say this for him, he left money enough to see her through for a good long spell to come, and bury her at the end of it, ef it comes to that.'

'Since how much time have they arrived here?' inquired M. Jacques, passing his hand over his forehead, and rolling his eyes a little.

'Let's see—wa'al—I guess it might be nigh on six months back,' replied Silas, absently drawing a chunk of tobacco from his pocket, and biting off a piece of it. 'He was one of them ar paintin' fellows—loafed about with brushes and colours, and made picters of things. Why, he up and made a picter of Eph Mullen here, his old smack—her as got her nose knocked off her in a gale last September—didn't he now, Eph?'

'Wa'al mebbe he did,' said Eph guardedly, 'though mind you, mister, I'd sooner a had a new boat than all the picters he could paint—and so I telled him. But he gev the picter to my old woman, and it's fixed up along uv the Declaration uv Independence in our best sittin'-room, naow.'

The Frenchman breathed quickly, and the bony white hands which were clasped before him on the table separated and clenched themselves together. 'This man—is it that you have no—how do you say?—no address of him—to write—to find—nothing?'

'Wa'al, ef there be, I ain't heard of it, nor Eph neither, nor yet Pete Simmons,' the spokesman replied. 'The young man he started off sudden—some says he got a letter, and started right away next mornin'—and mebbe he forgot to post us up whar he was agoin' to.'

And Silas spat abruptly at the knob of the brass andiron, hit it, and sighed.

'Look-a-here, old man,' exclaimed Pete Simmons, opening his mouth for the first time, and delivering himself in a thin, querulous drawl, 'do'n' know what yeow may think, but I guess stoppin' heer an' gassin' 'baout nothin' in pertircler ain't a goin' to dew that ar gal no good anyhaow! Sa-ay, air yeow goin' to hitch along, or ain't yer?'

'Pete has got the bulge on us this time, sir, and no mistake,' remarked Silas, sighing again and rising to his feet. 'So, ef you ain't got nothin' to say agin it, I guess mebbe we'd as well get out o' this, and lay for old marm Dudgeon's.'

The Frenchman silently signified his assent, and the party, with no more words, left the inn and set out for the house under the elm. Having escorted M. Jacques to the door, and given three solemn and weighty knocks upon it, the deputation severally shook hands with him and departed, leaving him and their responsibility to Mrs. Dudgeon.

The old woman took the visitor up stairs to the door of a chamber on the right of the passage, the window of which looked eastwards across the Atlantic towards England. The door stood a little ajar, and from within came the sound of a woman's moaning, clearly

audible amidst the dull thunder of the surf on the distant shore. Mrs. Dudgeon paused with the latch in her hand, and surveyed M. Jacques from head to foot by the light of the rush candle which she carried.

'Air you a medical man, mister?' she demanded.

'Madame, in my life I have often cared for unfortunates who have been ill,' said the Frenchman solemnly, and in a husky tone. 'I have also had myself a wife and infants. I pray you permit that I enter; and favour me to remain out of door till I summon.'

'Wa'al, she's a pretty sick woman, that's my idee,' remarked the lady, holding open the door and making way for him to pass. 'Mind you be kindly to her, mister; for ef she's gone wrong she ain't the fust, nor she won't be the last, neither! Whatever goes crooked in this world, it's the women what gets the wust on it, every time. They're down on their luck, from mother Eve to that ar gal, every one on 'em; an' it's the men as brings 'em to it—that's my idee! There's a bottle on the mantelshelf, mister, and t'other duds afore the fire; an' when you want me, you thump on the floor, which I'll be underneath.'

The door closed softly behind M. Jacques. Mrs. Dudgeon went down stairs. She, too, had melancholy days in her memory; she had been Eve's daughter, and had felt the enticement of passion, and had feared the mule's heel of society. Whether or not she had escaped immaculate no one knows. In either case the situation is hard enough.

There is an arrogant, self-sufficient devil alive in the world, masquerading under the plausible title of Honour. His cajolery consists in dangling before our eyes the smug security of the moral law, and by means of it persuading us to worship ourselves in him. His reward for this squalid idolatry is that we should be enabled to thank God that we are not as other men are. Too late—often not at all—we discover that there is no respect of persons with God; in other words, that only our common nature is God's creation, and only our private individuality is our own; the former being God's image, the latter, the image of God's opposite. To ascribe to this perverted and isolated little shape, therefore, the miracle which the creative mercy is accomplishing in humanity at large, is to claim Heaven for that quality in us, only in spite of which Heaven can receive us. And to think about honour as a possible private possession is for an atomical creature, lifeless and impotent in himself, to assume the awful garment sacred to the Omnipotent Perfection alone. So that if M. Jacques, or anybody else, thought that his honour was compromised by a failure to observe the moral law, he must first have imposed upon his own shoulders the responsibility of universal human nature; and thereby relieved of that burden no less a rival than God Himself.

Men, however, are fortunately but seldom aware of their own absurdity, though this is the only feature of their character that ever rises to the dimensions of the sublime; and it may be hoped, con-

sequently, that M. Jacques did not altogether know what he was about in his interview with the unknown woman in the cottage bedroom at Suncook. What passed at that interview has never, indeed, been made public, and it is from subsequent developments only that any inferences with regard to it can be drawn. In an hour or so Mrs. Dudgeon was summoned up stairs; before morning a son was born into the world, and in the evening of the same day the young mother died, her dying eyes fixed to the last on the line of the eastern horizon, for the sea was visible from where she lay. M. Jacques, who had not learned from her what he most wished to know, appeared to regard her decease with a certain gloomy composure, as being probably the best thing that could happen under the circumstances; though how, from his philosophical standpoint, he could rationally believe this, is a question not readily answerable. The woman was buried, and M. Jacques, after some hesitation, seems to have decided to spend the rest of his days in the remote New England village where her body lay. He bought Mrs. Dudgeon's house, paying that lady a handsome sum for it, procured a nurse for the child, sent to Europe for certain of his belongings, and settled down to a lonely and reserved existence. He admitted no social visits, and made none; but he occasionally gave his services to the villagers in the double capacity of physician and lawyer. Popular he certainly was not, but he was respected and in some degree feared. He wielded the silent influence which belongs to a man who can keep his own counsel and dispense with familiar intercourse with his kind. No one knew who M. Jacques was, why he came to Suncook, or wherefore he remained there. The suggestion was made, of course, that some peculiar relation had subsisted between him and the young woman whose death he witnessed; but the hypothesis lost vitality for lack of contradiction, even more than because there was no definite proof to adduce in support of it. He was a countryman of hers, no doubt, but there was nothing to show that he was anything more than that. As for his adoption of the child, that was no more than might have been expected. The child had French blood in him, and M. Jacques was therefore more likely than any one else to take an interest in him. He was, moreover, an exceedingly attractive little fellow, and might grow up in time to be a credit to the community. This, of course, was before Jack arrived at the age when it was proper for him to go to school, and before, therefore, the school board had had that interview with M. Jacques, the issue of which was so unsatisfactory to the advocates of orderly and respectable citizenship. But there was no one bold enough to defy the old man's will. A semi-superstitious awe enveloped him. What did he do in all the hours of his solitude? It was asserted and believed that the room in which the French girl had died had been kept locked up ever since, yet fishermen, anchored by night in the offing, were ready to affirm that they had seen the window of that room alight, and that the shadow of more figures than one had fallen on the curtain. Belated wanderers along the shore had heard,

or fancied they had heard, strange voices proceeding from the ancient house, voices raised in altercation, or moaning in entreaty. The study was another subject of ingenious speculation and rumour. It became known in some way that a portrait hung upon its walls which, when it first arrived from abroad with the rest of the old gentleman's possessions, had showed the clear and lovely lineaments of a young girl's face. Since occupying its present position, however, a mysterious and murky obscurity had come over it, only a dark square of canvas was now discernible, with the bare suggestion of a shadowy human countenance in the midst of it. There were, moreover, certain chemical appliances in this room, concerning the nature and object of which explanation was urgently needed. To maintain that they were merely the materials and instruments of M. Jacques's medical investigations was to shirk the true import of the enigma. That was the superficial and obvious solution; but M. Jacques would not be the M. Jacques of popular imagination if his appearances were anything else but the cloak and disguise of very different realities. The traditions of the days of witchcraft were not so obsolete but that the old Frenchman could be accredited with some knowledge of its unholy arcana. Who could tell whether he were not in search of the elixir of life, the universal solvent, or the philosopher's stone? Or perhaps he was prosecuting studies into the nature and properties of poisons, with a view to concocting some infernal mixture which should make men die an apparently natural death, or cause them to evaporate away into thin air!

The record of benighted gossip like the above is worth making only in so far as it may show how much idle mischief may be generated by those whose lives, for any cause, are shrouded from the simple daylight. Men know so little, that they are ever prone to improve opportunities for justifying the probability of what they do not know. Persons, therefore, who furnish such opportunities are chargeable with some of the responsibility of the survival of superstition; and probably few persons' secrets are so valuable as to compensate for that drawback. Moreover, the secret is tolerably sure to come out sooner or later, and so forfeits even the poor excuse of personal expediency.

CHAPTER V.

Showing how men of one purpose are not always men of one mind; and how the unexpected is sometimes opportune, at least to some people.

It was not easy to lose one's way in Suncook, and even a stranger like Mr. Murdoch had no difficulty in recognising Mossy Jakes's house; it was the first object that met his eye after leaving the ravine. His mind, so much of it at least as he could spare from the consideration of his own aching bones, was absorbed in speculating as

to who M. Jacques could be, and what attitude he was likely to hold with reference to Mr. Murdoch's designs. In planning out his enterprise, the sagacious clergyman had not included in his calculations any such being as M. Jacques; and it was of course possible that this unexpected personage might necessitate the readjustment of the whole scheme. But upon the whole, Mr. Murdoch was disposed to think that his hopes would be facilitated rather than thwarted by the Frenchman's intervention.

As he approached the house he eyed it with the curiosity of a general who endeavours to form some estimate of the character of his antagonist from the aspect of his fortifications. But the indications in this instance were of a severely non-committal sort. The place had an indrawn look, as though its life were carried on so deep within it as to leave few traces of its nature outside. There were no flowers in the windows; the walls had an uncared-for appearance; the grass grew tall and raggedly in the shaded corners, untrodden by feet of mankind or animals, as round a place which domestic existence has deserted. There was no cackle of fowls in the farmyard; the leaves of many autumns lay rotting beneath the broad canopy of the elm. No tread or voices of children or of servants made the threshold cheerful. The organic ebb and flow of a human dwelling—the beating of its heart and the movement of its breath—were absent. If anything had its abode here, one might have expected it to be some dry old skeleton, grinning silently at the emptiness of its own brown ribs, and mocking the spiritual death whereof it was the emblem.

Mr. Murdoch knocked at the front door; but the sound echoed hollowly through the house, and drew forth no answer but an echo. After waiting a while he went round to the back door, which bore more symptoms of having been used some time within the present century; but his efforts to obtain admittance here were as fruitless as at the other end. Rather disconcerted at this unresponsiveness, and beginning to doubt whether his active young acquaintance of the ravine might not have mischievously misled him as to the place being inhabited at all, the reverend gentleman now walked round to the seaward side of the edifice, and endeavoured to investigate the aspect of the interior through one of the windows. The light fell upon the glass in such a way, however, and the glass itself was so dim with dust on the inside and with the saline deposit of the sea breezes without, that he could not be certain whether he beheld a room or the dull reflection of the external landscape. He was just about to give up his efforts, when he was startled to find that there was a human face on the opposite side of the pane, the eyes of which were staring into his own. He involuntarily gave back a step; but the face moved forward, until its wrinkled forehead rested against the sash. It was an aged face, and almost colourless; with hollow cheeks, thin white hair, and prominent nose and chin. If it had not been for the singular blackness and intensity of the sunken eyes, the visage might have been taken for that of a corpse.

In a moment or two the clergyman had recovered himself sufficiently to take off his hat and make this apparition a bow. Whether or not the courtesy were returned he could not tell; but presently the sash was slowly raised, and the apparition stood revealed in the attributes of palpable reality. It continued to gaze at the clergyman without speaking.

'May I inquire,' said the latter, with another bow, 'whether I have the pleasure of addressing M. Jacques?'

'I am M. Jacques,' the other replied, in the tone of one to whom speech was unfamiliar. 'I have not the custom to receive visits.'

'Permit me, then, to carry on the conversation in French,' rejoined Mr. Murdoch, ignoring the latter sentence, and expressing himself fluently and with good accent in his interlocutor's native tongue. 'Though an Englishman by birth, and a clergyman of the Established Church, my life has been spent for several years past in France, and I have many friends there.'

'You would probably find more friends there than here,' observed the Frenchman indifferently; 'for me, I live here in order not to be disturbed by friendly attentions.' And he appeared to be on the point of closing the window.

'One moment, monsieur!' exclaimed Mr. Murdoch, thus constrained to bring matters to the test without further preamble. 'Did you, during the earlier part of your residence here, happen to have heard mention of a person by the name of Malgrè?'

The old gentleman remained silent and without movement for a full minute after the asking of this question; only there was a slight lifting of the upper lids of his eyes, such as is said to occur with one who beholds a vision. At length he said, in a voice which steadied itself by a manifest effort, 'You have not told me your own name, monsieur.'

'Ah, pardon me for the omission! Murdoch—a clergyman of the Church of England—at your service. Can I, then, hope to secure your attention for a short time?' he added, with an engaging manner, and an inward conviction that this time he had fallen upon his feet.

'I will come out, M. Murdoch. We will speak together in the meadow; my house is not a place to entertain visitors,' said the Frenchman, still uttering his sentences with difficulty. 'I will come out,' he repeated; and then, after a pause of a few seconds, he abruptly shut the window and disappeared.

'He is an odd old beggar!' muttered Mr. Murdoch to himself, as he paced across the grass-plot and found a seat upon one of the fallen stones of the wall. 'Well, I intend to get a glass of wine out of him, if I get nothing else; though he doesn't look as if he had ever heard of such a thing. Humph! I touched him in some sensitive place, whatever it was. At all events, he can't do much to hinder me, and possibly he may be useful. Damn that boy! I shan't sleep comfortably for a week after this. Ah! but I shall sleep the softer for the next—well, say thirty years, possibly longer. What a thing it

is to be a man of enterprise—wide-awake—eh? Oh, my prophetic soul! Anybody else would have called it folly; but I knew my man. Of course, nothing might have come of it; but the wise man leaves nothing to chance. What shall I do with the young brat? I almost wish—— however, there'll be time enough to consider about that. First impulses are sometimes the best, though, after all.'

Mr. Murdoch had plenty of time to take counsel with himself before M. Jacques came out; and it was not until he had almost come to the conclusion that he had been entirely forgotten that the Frenchman appeared. His bearing now was neither so apathetic nor so distraught as it had been at the previous interview: on the contrary, he seemed alert and keen, and even younger by some years than at first. He had on a hat and coat of antique fashion, but of fine quality, and altogether looked like a man in whom a new fire of life had been kindled upon the embers of one nearly extinct. He walked up to Mr. Murdoch with a firm and balanced step, and saluted him ceremoniously with the old-fashioned clouded cane that he carried.

'Before we discourse any further, M. Murdoch,' he said, standing before the other in a formal attitude, as if he were having his portrait taken, 'I wish to know whether you are here to ask questions or to answer them?'

'I am not quite clear, M. Jacques, how far your own acquaintance or connection with the subject in view will enable me to do either,' the clergyman answered. 'I am anxious, on the one hand, to avoid any indiscretion, and, on the other, not to withhold any information I may possess from any person entitled to receive it.'

'It is not impossible,' said M. Jacques, after intently eying his interlocutor for a few moments, 'that I may be as able as anyone alive to speak with knowledge on the matter which seems to have brought you hither. But there is a purpose here,' he added, striking his breast dramatically with his hand, 'which has abode with me for many years, and to execute which is the end for which I live. Unless you can aid me in that purpose, you need look to me for no aid in whatever project you may have in view.'

'My dear M. Jacques, to be quite sincere with you, I am inclined to doubt whether the assistance which I may have the good fortune to render you could be repaid by anything that you could elucidate for me. In fact, it is not information that I chiefly require; I took the precaution to furnish myself with that before setting out on my journey; and I have already, since coming here, found confirmation of most of the conjectures I had formed. I have come here to act: and my object in calling upon you was in the main to apprise you, as a matter of courtesy, of the action that I intend; and, should you object to it, to learn in what way it might be modified to suit your inclinations.'

'If your position be so impregnable,' returned the Frenchman, wrinkling his cheeks, 'you will perhaps not refuse to declare more explicitly what it is?'

'A few facts, at all events, shall be at your service, if only to justify you in reposing confidence in me,' answered the other, with a wave of the hand. 'Fourteen years ago or more there was a young lady living in Paris called Annette Malgrè. She left Paris suddenly, and was never seen or heard of there again. A gentleman travelled with her . . . and, in short, my dear M. Jacques, they came here, and, as I presume you are aware, things took their ordinary course. The poor girl was disgraced; she became a mother; but the child was never claimed by its father. It survives, however, and is now a well-grown lad, with a good deal of his father's look.'

'You know him, then?' demanded M. Jacques, in a quick, sharp tone, and stretching his head forward like a bird of prey scenting its quarry.

'I had a conversation with him an hour ago in the ravine yonder, and came very near getting shot by one of his arrows,' returned the clergyman with a genial laugh.

'Bah! it is not of him I speak!' cried the other, violently; it is of the father!'

'Oh! I understand!' said Mr. Murdoch, slowly, and with the dawn of a new perception expanding in his face. 'You are interested in the father? Yes, yes—to be sure! And probably . . . . it would be no more than natural if . . . . you bore him a little grudge?'

'A grudge! Body of God! monsieur,' rejoined the old Frenchman, his voice sinking almost to a whisper, while his face became deadly pale, and his limbs trembled, 'if to bear a grudge is to wish to see him buried alive in the grave of her he ruined . . . . bah! You will pardon my intemperance, monsieur. But, in short, I do not love him: and I should like to hear more of him.'

The reverend gentleman arose from the stone on which he was seated, walked two or three paces away and back again, ran his fingers through his hair, and betrayed a number of other similar symptoms of being impressed and aroused. He did not, however, as yet see his way clearly before him. Much of what he had said to M. Jacques, though he had given it a turn as of a matter of established fact, admitting of no doubt, had been in reality little better than shrewd conjecture, which he was anxious to see confirmed without betraying his own uncertainty. And now he was doubtful as to how far, without cost or compromise to himself, he might venture to take his new acquaintance into his confidence. The light just obtained upon M. Jacques's attitude towards the father of the boy, while it promised decided advantages in some respects, in other respects tended to produce undesirable complications. Two men may strongly desire the same end, and yet differ so widely in regard to the means they are willing to employ to compass it, as to thwart each other more than ordinary opponents would do. However, Mr. Murdoch had met with such fair success thus far, that he trusted to luck to prosper him a little further.

'M. Jacques,' he said brusquely, turning upon that personage, and speaking with an air of impulsive candour, 'let me tell you at once that I love the gentleman you refer to no more than you yourself do; and that I know—what you do not—the way to make him sensible of our reprobation. He has done me an inexcusable injury: I must call it so, although, as a clergyman, it is my duty to put as charitable a construction upon it as possible—' Here the speaker was interrupted by a harsh, significant burst of laughter from his auditor. 'Well,' he continued—'well, M. Jacques, I will concede that I am but human, and that I cannot but feel my wrongs as keenly as any other man. He has injured me, then; and I presume I am not mistaken in assuming that he has injured you. Now, in a case like this, when our central common object is—shall I speak the word?—revenge, it is plain that we can afford to respect one another's reasonable prejudices and reserves. I shall not inquire, my dear friend, what may be the particular circumstances of your case; I shall not ask who you are or how you have suffered; it is enough for me to know that you desire—once more I say it—revenge, and that I am prepared to co-operate with you to that end to the extent of my ability. I concede this much to your sensibilities; and I am therefore justified—am I not?—in claiming as great, or nearly as great, an indulgence from you. Is it agreed?'

'You are a man of many words, monsieur,' said the old man grimly. 'For my own part, once I can see my way to strike my enemy where he may feel the agony of the thrust most poignantly, I shall care little for reserves or concealments of any kind. Assuredly, on the other hand, I can feel no curiosity regarding yourself, apart from the attainment of my desire.'

'Have I also the assurance that you would not shrink from striking at him, even should the blow in some degree threaten other interests which you ——'

'Monsieur, in one word,' broke in M. Jacques, impatiently, 'I have no other interest, no other concern in the world beside this. After that—the deluge!'

'The interest of which I was thinking,' rejoined the clergyman in his slow tone, 'was the one I alluded to a few minutes since .... the boy, Jack.'

'I do not comprehend you, monsieur,' said the other, dropping his arms to his sides, while a look of trouble began to relax the hard rigidity of his former expression. 'A boy—a boy so young as that can have nothing to do with affairs like ours. It cannot be. You did not intend it so.'

'You will remember, my dear M. Jacques,' returned the other, handling his whiskers and glancing aside, 'that the boy Jack is the son of the man on whom you wish to be revenged.'

'He is not his son,' exclaimed the Frenchman, with agitation; 'not in the sense that you insinuate, monsieur. In the course of nature he is his son; but not by growth, not by education, not by

sympathy or knowledge. And this father of his, who has never even seen him, who cannot even know whether he exists, and who, if he knew it, would gladly forget it again—do you mean to tell me that this man is to be harmed by inflicting suffering upon an innocent boy? No, monsieur, I cannot agree with you; and I inform you that I desire no deputied revenge; it is my enemy in his own person with whom I would deal. If you have no better suggestion to offer than that, we have wasted one another's time to no purpose.'

'Stay one moment, my friend,' said Murdoch, composedly, laying a finger upon the old man's arm as he was turning away. 'I fancy you have not quite caught my meaning. There is no harm coming to the boy in the first place; he may attain any height of happiness or prosperity that he pleases, for all that I should do to prevent him. But the case is this; his father is a man who owns vast estates and a great property in England. This property has been in the family for several centuries, in the direct male descent. But the conditions of its inheritance are a little peculiar . . . . It will be enough, for the moment, to tell you that it is of the last importance to the holder of the title to have a son. It is so important, my dear M. Jacques, that if no son born in wedlock survives, and there be a son born out of wedlock, then that son will be made legitimate, and the inheritance will be his. Well, then, the man we are speaking of, after he returned to England thirteen years ago, leaving this unhappy girl to die uncared for—he, I say, married a lady of his own rank in life; and three children were born; but they were all girls, and they all died in infancy; and about a year ago the mother died likewise. All that is very sad; she was a most estimable person, and incapable of harming any one; perhaps she was better in another world.' The clergyman rolled these periods under his tongue with evident gusto; he was sailing with a fair wind, and was inclined to make a good run of it. The Frenchman, meanwhile, had seated himself upon a stone, with his head between his hands, and his eyes fixed in a point-blank gaze that seemed to see nothing. Murdoch continued—'Now, here is this gentleman, left a widower, and childless; and, to make matters worse, he is afflicted with a disease which may carry him off at any moment. He is in no condition to marry again, and yet, for special reasons, he would sacrifice what remains to him of life, without hesitation or compunction, if by so doing he could secure a son of his own in the succession. I trust I am making myself understood, my dear M. Jacques; this man is so given up to worldly lusts and cares, that he accounts life itself as nothing in comparison with the gratification of seeing his own flesh and blood inherit his possessions. Now our point that we have been coming to is this: this man, recollecting the sins and wickedness of his youth, says to himself, "Perhaps out of that very sin I may raise up the means of realising my ambition. I will send and make investigations on the scene of my wickedness, and discover whether a child of my iniquity yet survives, to whom I may hand over this great legacy, and be at peace."

Such, my friend, is the language of the man whom we have determined to chastise; and I should like to know,' added the reverend gentleman, dropping the pulpit vein, and relapsing into the colloquial, 'I should like to know what better or fairer revenge we could take, than simply to remove that son of his out of the way; to destroy all proofs of his identity, if any exist; and so to see his lordship go down to his grave without one solitary gleam of hope or comfort. Upon my soul!' exclaimed this worthy person, rubbing his large hands together in the overflow of his enthusiasm, 'it will be as poetical and complete a thing as ever I heard of; if it were only possible to let him know of the boy's existence, while for ever preventing him from getting hold of him . . . . that would be perfect indeed!'

'You spoke of removing the boy out of the way,' observed M. Jacques, raising his head from his hands at the conclusion of this oration. 'What does that mean?'

'Anything you like, my dear M. Jacques! The boy himself does not seem to be at all cognisant of his true history, and he would therefore be safer in any other part of the world than this, where there are probably persons to whom some of the circumstances of his birth are known. I am ready to take him with me to any country you choose to name; it makes no difference to me; and if you contemplate enriching him with this world's goods——'

'I should not trouble you, monsieur, with any of those details,' interposed the Frenchman, with sufficient dryness. After a short pause he rose to his feet, and added, 'Have the kindness to follow me into the house, monsieur. I desire your opinion upon a matter which cannot be entered into here.'

They crossed the grass-plot, passing round towards the front entrance of the house. Before reaching it, M. Jacques faced round towards his companion, and said—

'You have not yet told me what you are to gain by depriving the boy of his inheritance. Does anything he loses go into your pockets?'

The clergyman jerked his head back and puffed out his cheeks.

'You forget, monsieur,' he said, with gravity, 'that neither have I pried into the grounds of your hostility against his lordship.'

'Well—very well!' returned the other, with a movement of the mouth and eyebrows of no complimentary import. 'Would it likewise incommode you to mention his lordship's title?'

'By no means,' was the prompt reply. 'His name is Floyd Vivian, Baron Castlemere.'

M. Jacques was silent a moment.

'I shall not forget it,' he then said, slowly and inwardly. 'Where is Floyd Vivian, Lord Castlemere, to be found?'

'That I cannot take the responsibility of telling you—at least, not at present,' said the clergyman, stroking his long black whiskers, and staring abstractedly past his companion down the lane that led

to the village. 'He is at least three thousand miles from here, to begin with . . . . and . . . . if——'

He stopped short.

M. Jacques looked at him. An extraordinary change had come over his countenance. Its rubicundity was gone, and the pallor revealed unpleasantly the unsightly roughness of the skin. His mouth was relaxed, while his eyes were strained and bloodshot, and the pupils distended.

'What is the matter?' inquired M. Jacques.

Mr. Murdoch, still with his strained stare, slowly lifted one arm and pointed down the lane. At the distance of some three hundred yards, two figures were approaching, hand in hand—a middle-aged man of slender build and rather feeble bearing, and a little black-haired girl of about ten years of age. There were only these two.

Murdoch caught the Frenchman by the lappel of his coat, and moved backwards beneath the porch, pulling the other after him.

'Did you know—know he was here?'

The man spoke as if there were an obstruction in his throat.

'What do you mean, monsieur? Who is here? They? Who are they?' the Frenchman demanded curiously.

'Let me get into the house,' exclaimed Murdoch, his voice breaking out with a harsh note of panic in it. 'Put me in some room—say nothing of my being here! Let me in.'

He grasped the door handle and shook it.

'Do you mean that this is——?' began the other, in a strange tone.

'Great God! don't waste any more time here; don't you see he will be here in another moment?' cried the clergyman, his ugly pallor deepening. 'I tell you I must not be seen.'

'It is he, then,' said M. Jacques, very quietly, opening the door and allowing Murdoch to enter. 'My faith, he comes in good season.'

CHAPTER VI.

A conversation about skeletons; some remarks on the philosophy of change; and whether it is wiser to be wicked at the beginning of life, or at the end of it.

THE middle-aged, feeble gentleman, whose appearance in the lane had so greatly agitated Mr. Murdoch, as described at the close of the last chapter, had arrived in Suncook about six hours previously. He had driven over that morning in a carriage and pair, from a town about thirty miles to the southward, and had put up at the village hotel—a quite pretentious edifice, which had arisen from the ashes of that little inn that had received M. Jacques fourteen years before. The Phœnix Hotel was its name, painted in black letters across its white front.

Its existence was about contemporaneous with the emancipation of the village from the dominion of whisky and disreputability, and its proprietor was a gentleman who had experienced religion, and was of opinion that he could make it pay. It had two rows of windows on the side, six to a row, all fitted with bright green shutters; and the front entrance was approached by a flight of six wooden steps. A common remark about it in the mouths of the villagers was to the effect that it only needed a steeple to make it a meeting-house; and indeed it would have answered for a Methodist meeting-house as it was. In spite of these attractions, however, the hotel was not a marked success in a financial point of view, though no doubt it gave a certain character to the village. The proprietor (who had embraced strict temperance along with the other virtues), after long hoping against hope, had latterly begun to question within himself whether the welfare of his own soul would really be jeopardised by the sale of drinkables across his bar, and whether, even supposing that to be the case, fulness of grace is after all worth enjoying at the expense of emptiness of pocket. Had the existence of whisky been dependent upon its presence in the Phœnix Hotel, no doubt the experiment of not having it there would have worn a more prosperous aspect; but unluckily the accursed thing flowed none the less merrily in other channels for being turned out of this one. The proprietor, therefore, had fallen into a state of moral anxiety not far removed from spiritual tergiversation, when the roll of wheels and the tramp of steeds waked him out of his reverie, and brought a temporary glow of gratification to his chilled sensibilities.

The new arrival comprised four persons: an elderly man and woman, evidently domestics of the better class; a handsome, rather pale gentleman, with an aquiline nose, large blue eyes, and almost feminine mouth and chin—altogether, a refined and rather pathetic-looking visage; finally, a child who had just arrived at the age when children—female children especially—begin to enter their least attractive period of existence, but who, even then, possessed a very remarkable pair of black eyes, with well-marked and mobile eyebrows, and a singularly noticeable and characteristic way of holding herself and of moving her head and hands.

When the party had been accommodated with rooms—a process attended with the less difficulty inasmuch as the hotel was all before them where to choose—and orders had been given for dinner to be ready at the old-fashioned New England hour of one o'clock, the gentleman and the little girl sallied forth together for a stroll about the village. The gentleman moved with a sauntering step, pausing every now and then to gaze about him, and responding with a kindly yet absent manner to the prattle of the child. 'Uncle,' she exclaimed at length, turning her eyes upon him with an air like an offended heroine of the stage in miniature, 'you are answering me randomly!'

'At random, you mean, my pet,' the uncle replied, in a gentle murmurous tone.

'Randomly is a nice word. I do not love you when you are like this.'

'Now, Madeléine, you are to blame! You called me uncle when you know I want you to call me papa; so you must expect to be answered randomly.'

'I think this is a very stupid place. Why did we stop here?'

'Oh, to look about a little and see what changes have taken place.'

'How can we tell whether there are any changes?'

'Oh, every place changes; all the world changes; you and I change.'

'I never change!' said the young lady with emphasis. 'How have you changed?'

'Well, my hair used to be a very dark brown, and now it is getting to look powdered, like the footmen's in London. And there are wrinkles at the corners of my eyes, and across my forehead, where it used to be as smooth as yours. And I have a great deal less time to live than I used to have.'

'That is not changing; that is only growing old. But inside you must be the same; because, if you were not, how should I know every day that you are the same uncle?'

'I am afraid I am changed inside as well.'

The child looked up to him with as much earnestness as if she intended to penetrate with her gaze the innermost recesses of his being. 'Do you mean,' she inquired solemnly, 'that once you were good and now you are wicked?'

The gentleman smiled a moment; then a dejected expression darkened over his face 'I hope I am not more wicked than I used to be,' he said. 'But I may have been wicked once, perhaps; and now I cannot understand why I was wicked.'

'That will not be my way,' rejoined the little personage, lifting her head. 'I am good now; but I mean to be very wicked when I grow up!'

'You should not say that,' observed the gentleman, who, however, was evidently used to her quaint remarks, and attached little serious importance to them. 'Besides, that would be changing; and you said just now that you should never change.'

'No, that will not be changing, because the wickedness is inside me now; but I cannot make it come out until I am a woman. I do not know how, yet; but I feel it coming.'

'I think it is coming so fast that it will be all out and done with long before you are a woman,' returned the gentleman, glancing down at her with another brief smile. 'Come, let us cross over this field to the cluster of rocks yonder. I want to see if they are the same——'

'The same as what?' demanded the child, seeing that he paused.

'The same as before you were born.'

'You were going to say something else!' she exclaimed keenly;

and before he could reply she added, 'I don't like to go through this field; there are graves in it!' It was, in fact, the cemetery of Suncook; though not as yet a very flourishing settlement.

'Why don't you like graves?' inquired her companion.

'Because there are skeletons in them; and there is a skeleton in me; and they make me feel as if I were a sort of grave; and I am made of earth too, you know, and my skeleton is buried in it.'

'Pooh! little girls have no skeletons. They are all full of the milk of human kindness. Come along! There are no skeletons here that we know.'

They went onwards slowly, the gentleman a little in front. But presently the child called out to him, and he stopped and turned round. She was standing in front of a low, white marble headstone, and pointing at the inscription on it.

'Here is a skeleton that has a name like yours,' she said. 'Is it your wife?'

'You should not say such things, Madeleine,' he answered, coming hastily back, with a flush in his cheeks. 'You know it is not safe for me to be startled.' All at once he turned white, and put out his hand to the girl's shoulder, on which, for a few moments, he supported himself. 'Ah!' muttered he.

The headstone read as follows, in black lettering, which the dry climate of that region had left in almost its original state: 'Annette Floyd, died March 16th, 182—.' This was the entire inscription.

'Who was she?' asked Madeleine; 'was she your wife or your sister? And why was she put here?'

The gentleman seated himself upon the mound of the grave without answering. The spot seemed to have been kept neat, and clear of weeds and brambles, though no flowers had been planted there, nor had any wreaths, or other loving or respectful emblems been laid upon it. The breeze from the Atlantic swept across it, and sitting there, one's gaze might range unimpeded towards the far-off east. There were no trees in the neighbourhood; the field was a low upland, the soil sandy. But here lay the body of Annette Floyd, who in her lifetime had had a loving heart and a passionate nature. Fourteen years she had lain there, while the world went round, with its myriad loves and hates, and rights and wrongs; its fretful business, its irrevocable idleness; its foolish wealth, and its meagre poverty. There she lay; or rather, as Madeleine had said, there lay a skeleton—a grotesque, unsightly something that was not Annette, and yet was nothing else but her; related to her in somewhat the same way as were these barren and unconscious years of death to the sweet, bright, wilful, tender years of life that had preceded them. As the refined, blue-eyed gentleman sat there, staring, not at the headstone, but at the grassy mound itself, it seemed to him that no grim form of death, but the living, warm, soft-cheeked Annette herself lay imprisoned beneath the soil, and that her loving eyes were striving to meet his own—her lips, so often kissed, tremulous for one kiss more. No; it was true

that all things change. Why had he been wicked? Was anything which these years had brought him worth what he had given for it? Now they seemed but as an hour—an hour choked up with fatal folly and futility, in which many a dreary miracle had been wrought. And the dreariest of all the miracles was, that, looking into his heart, he could not find there any lively grief or intolerable anguish, but at most only a dull sense of dissatisfaction with himself. His imagination could dally with tragic fancies, as an actor strives to identify himself with his part; but to be and suffer the real tragedy was no longer in his power. Annette had no monopoly of death; something within himself had also died during the fourteen years, and he had borne the corpse of it about with him, and now had brought it here. He himself was a living grave, as Madeleine had said.

Madeleine, meanwhile, had been idling about the little cemetery, inspecting the various tombstones with a mixture of interest and aversion; her hands clasped behind her back, and her long black hair blowing about her face and neck in the warm breeze. Occasionally she cast glances in the direction of her companion; but as he still remained seated idly in the same position, she at length lost patience, and went up to him—

'I prefer not to stay here any longer,' she said, with her curious union of childish tones with a distinct utterance and somewhat artificial phraseology. 'No one else is here that we know; and you have stayed with this one long enough.'

'Give me your hand, then, and help me to get up,' answered the gentleman.

'Uncle Floyd, did you kill Annette?' inquired the child, after she had helped him to regain his feet. 'Did you murder her, and then bury her here at night, and fly to England, so as not to be guillotined?'

'What puts such thoughts into your mind, Madeleine?'

'If you speak like that I shall believe you did murder her, and fear I shall reveal your guiltiness. You need not be afraid,' the child added, with a wave of her little hand. 'I do not mind such things. I like to be the people—how they would feel and what they would do. I have been pretending what Annette felt when you murdered her; and then, how you were, when you were doing it. Was it in the night-time? Was there a storm? And—a dagger?'

As she spoke, the little creature assumed an expression and a pose so dramatic and suggestive as really to make it seem, for a moment, as if the genius of slaughter had entered into her.

'Come, Madeleine,' said Uncle Floyd, after a pause. They went side by side to the pile of rocks where the land broke away towards the shore. He trod heedfully on the rough juts of stone until, turning a corner of the pile, a short ledge appeared, shaped very like a seat, with a back to it, and just wide enough for two people to sit in it comfortably. From here was a fine view over the bay, and down the beach to the right, where the low headland, which served as a breakwater, ran out its dark and massive length, with the blue sea whiten-

ing round its margins, and breaking high against its seaward point. Further out to sea were sunken reefs, over which the waves churned at low water, or in storms. It was a dangerous coast, and there was much need of a lighthouse. Of late years, the regenerate citizens of Suncook had talked of building one there, and had even got so far as to memorialise the State legislature on the subject. They had got no further than that at present; but perhaps no more was to be expected of ordinary human nature.

'Is not that a pretty view?' asked the gentleman after a while.

'The blue is a pretty colour,' the child replied indifferently; 'but I do not care for the sea when it is like this. It ought to make a great roar, and go up and down like madness. I liked it that time we were in the ship, when it blew so.'

'Many a ship has been wrecked on those reefs,' said her companion. 'Once a great ship, with all her masts standing, came from beyond straight onwards to the point of the headland, not touching any of the outer rocks; and then she lifted up her keel, and dashed it down there; and she was rent asunder in a moment.'

'Was every one on board drowned?'

'Yes; every one.'

'I should like to have seen that; I like everything terrible that has people in it. It makes me feel all awake and warm. Did you see that ship?'

'Yes.'

'And were you sitting where you are now? And was Annette here beside you?'

'It is very naughty of you, Madeleine, to keep talking of Annette, when you know that I don't like it. You don't know what you are saying.'

'Yes, I know; I can see the things that you do not tell me, in your face. When we first got here, I knew that you had been here before; your eyes looked out so hard, and then jumped back as if something had flown at them; and your mouth kept going, as if you were talking in your mind. And you have been looking for something all the time; it can't be Annette, because she is a skeleton. What is it?'

'I wish your heart was half as awake as your eyes, my child. We have been together five years, and I have come to love you very much. Do you care anything about me?'

'Why should I care for you?'

'Have I not always been good to you, and given you everything you wanted?'

'If I ever care for anybody, it would not be for that; you give me things because it pleases you to see me have them. I want to care for somebody who does not care for me; or because it would be perilous for me to care for him. Then all sorts of things would happen. Nothing happens to us. You don't make me think about you enough.'

'Then, if I should tell you that when I die the property will be

left to some one else, and you have nothing, would you think about me more?'

'If you did that, I might hate you,' answered the child, meditatively. After a short silence she added, 'Who is it, a man or a woman?'

'Neither a man nor a woman. Let us go back to the hotel, Madeleine,' continued the gentleman, as if desirous to avoid any further questions from this too shrewd and opinionated young lady. 'We shall be late for our dinner.'

They went by the shore, so as to avoid passing again through the cemetery, which now Uncle Floyd wished no more than Madeleine; and they went in silence. But, as they entered the village street, Uncle Floyd asked—

'How would you like to have a brother, or something of that kind?'

'I would rather have a brother than a sister,' was her reply; 'but I want neither.'

'Not even a cousin?'

'If it was a maternal cousin I should not so much mind,' Madeleine replied; but more, perhaps, for the sake of using the fresh word she had picked up, than because she really knew any reason for preference, on one side or the other.

CHAPTER VII.

Illustrating the pains which civilised people are at to render life uncomfortable to themselves and those they meet; with a few of the many motives that actuate them therein.

'WELL, sir, I can't say I know much about the matter myself, not bein' a fam'ly man, and so not in the way of hearin' the women-folk gossip. Lemme see, though. French, I think you said? Well, now, I guess the best thing you kin do will be just to go right over to old Mossy Jakes's—that's where he lives, that lopsided old shanty with the elm-tree over it. He's a Frenchman himself, and if anybody kin tell you what you want to know, he's your man.'

This advice was proffered by Mr. Mullen (the proprietor of the Phœnix Hotel) to his new guest, in reply to some inquiries which the latter had made of him after dinner.

'Oh, in that house?' returned the guest, after looking in the direction in which Mr. Mullen was pointing. He took a cigar from his pocket, lit it, and then asked, 'How long has he lived there?'

'About fourteen years, there or thereabouts. Rather before my time, any way. I started this hotel, sir, just eight years ago, and I've run it ever since; and I'll undertake to say there ain't a handsomer hotel to be found in the State. Strict temperance principles, too.

Some say I'd do better to take in a little liquor. Well—some says the contrary; now what is your opinion, sir?'

'Mossy Jakes did you say his name was? Is he a married man? Has he children?'

'What, he? Well, I guess not; none I never saw nor heard of. There was a boy—that's so—a half-growed chap; he boarded with the old fellow fur a spell; but he was an out-and-out bad lot, and he's been runnin' wild in the woods this long while. There's some good folks, and payin' customers, likes their drop of whisky now and again; and mebbe it wouldn't hurt much just to let 'em have it. Hotels ain't meant to be reformatories, any way. Why, look here, sir——

'Then I believe I'll walk over there and have a word with him. Will you be kind enough, Mr. Miller, to tell my man to ask his mistress if she would accompany me? Thank you.'

Though the new guest's manner and his tone in speaking was so remarkably undemonstrative and gentle, there was something in his way of asking a favour which made refusal very difficult—even when the person he asked it of was taken in the middle of some sentence of the highest importance, and heard himself called Miller instead of Mullen into the bargain. 'He was for all the world the most like one of them Virginia planters,' Mr. Mullen was wont to say, when describing the incident afterwards: 'he look'd as if he'd never heard a man say contrairy to him, and that made you feel as if you didn't want to be the one to begin it.' So Mr. Mullen postponed his statement of views on the liquor question, and went and told David, the servant, that the young lady was wanted. In a few minutes Madeleine came down stairs, and she and the gentleman set forth in the way to the old red house beneath the elm.

They went more slowly now even than usual; but Madeleine noticed that Uncle Floyd smoked his cigar fast, and was very much preoccupied; and once, instead of answering some question she put to him, and which he seemed not to have heard, he suddenly stooped down and kissed her hard on the forehead. They were then quite near the house, into which she had seen two men enter a moment before. After that, Uncle Floyd threw away his cigar, and strode on more quickly.

On knocking, the door was opened at once by a queerly-dressed old man, with white hair and strange sharp eyes. He and Uncle Floyd looked at one another for a moment, and then the latter said—

'I was told at the hotel that I could obtain some information here on a subject that interests me. Can you spare me an hour this afternoon?'

'Make me the favour to enter, sir,' replied the other, with a manner of such courtliness as quite impressed Madeleine, and apprised Uncle Floyd that he had to deal with a gentleman of a type not indigenous to the new world. They entered, and the old man closed the door behind them. 'Be so good and go forward,' he said, 'and pass through the second door at your right.'

Following these directions, they found themselves in a rather small dusky room, with a dark cabinet of books, a littered table, and a framed canvas on the wall, but so blackened with age or dirt that the subject was indistinguishable.

After a few remarks of a general nature, the host took occasion to observe that possibly the young mademoiselle would not find the conversation interesting; but that there was, in a room up stairs, a tame squirrel, and also some picture-books, which she might find more amusing.

Madeleine assented to this view very readily, and the host escorted her up stairs accordingly.

When he returned to the study, his manner had undergone a certain change. It was more solemnly punctilious than heretofore, and reminded his visitor of nothing so much as the demeanour of some aristocratic Frenchmen and their seconds (of whom he had been one) in a duel many years ago.

The conversation was now carried on in French.

'Will monsieur, before I place myself at his service, oblige me with his name?'

'I am Baron Castlemere, when I am in England,' the other replied. 'Here, I believe, such titles are not recognised; but it will, perhaps, serve the purposes of our present interview. I merely wished to ask you for some information on a matter interesting chiefly to myself. You have lived here, I believe, a dozen years or more?'

'I arrived here, Monsieur le Baron, on the 15th of March, fourteen years ago. The house pleased me, I purchased it, and have resided here ever since.'

'The house being, I suppose, unoccupied at the time?'

'Not altogether, M. le Baron. On the night of the 15th of March it was occupied by its then owner, a certain Madame Dudgeon.'

'Dudgeon—yes,' said Lord Castlemere, taking hold of the arms of his chair with his white, blue-veined hands. 'She was living alone here, was she?'

'Not precisely alone,' the Frenchman said, wrinkling his cheeks. 'There was another young person here—a woman: but she was dying.'

'Ah! you saw her then? Were you with her when she died?'

'I had that pleasure, M. le Baron.'

'Why do you say pleasure, monsieur?' demanded the other, his face reddening.

'M. le Baron would no doubt have said the same had he been there,' the Frenchman returned icily. 'It should be said that this young woman was born of a good family, but she had abandoned herself and her honour to a lover; and this lover—this scoundrel, M. le Baron, after having brought her here and ruined her, deserted her: he went away, but, being not only a scoundrel but also a liar and a coward, he told the girl, at his departure, that he would soon return, or send for her to come to him. By this pretext he reconciled her to

the parting; but it is unnecessary to say that he did not keep his word to her. The word of honour of such men, M. le Baron, is a byword. The young girl nevertheless believed him; she believed that he would return up to the moment of her death, and she even left with me some trinkets or other—I know not what—to give to him when he should appear. But, as I was saying, for such a disgrace as hers death was the most desirable remedy; and on the evening following I had the pleasure—which you would have shared, monsieur—of witnessing it.'

'You have been pleased to use very hard words about a man of whom you know nothing—nor of his motives, nor circumstances,' said Lord Castlemere, whose face had twitched more than once during the progress of the other's speech. 'However, I am not here to defend him against you; whoever you are, he would not probably desire it. What I want is your information, not your opinions; and you may be assured that you will be paid liberally for whatever you can tell me.'

'Body of God!' cried the old Frenchman, rising trembling from his chair, his features twisted with passion, and all the sardonic designs for insulting his enemy under a specious guise of politeness forgotten in the hurry of his resentment: 'do you know, wretch, who I am to whom you offer money for the story of a dead woman's shame?'

Having got as far as this he paused to gather together his energies to utter, with a suitable thunder of emphasis and dramatic effect, the sentence of revelation. But the old man had miscalculated his strength. His physical forces were no longer adequate, as they once had been, to the expression of his rage; nay, even the rage itself, now that it was summoned to emerge from the imaginative realms in which it had been nourished for so many years, and to shape itself in living words, turned out to have lost half its vigour and keenness, and to have admitted in their stead a fatal leaven of human tenderness and remorse. Poor M. Jacques, therefore, after standing for a few moments with his tremulous arms held out before him, and his bony fists clenched, all at once sank back with a moan in his chair, and covered his face with his hands. 'My Annette—my child!' came quavering from him, with sobs that were of pity partly for himself and partly for her; 'thy father is too feeble even to avenge thee with dignity, or to vindicate his own honour against these insults.'

When Lord Castlemere heard these broken words, which were not meant for his ear, his heart sank, and he felt a pang of dull and shamefaced misery. For when, that morning, he had found himself at Annette's grave, no doubt he had experienced grief, but it was a grief made up of pity for the forlornness of his fate, combined with a certain involuntary and, as it were, paradoxical relief at the knowledge that she was now beyond his reach for good or ill; and that, whatever she had suffered, her suffering was over long ago. It was a retrospective pity—a remorse which, for the very reason that it related to

a wrong now irretrievable, was endurable, and almost seemed to carry with it a kind of mournful and romantic beauty. The cruel and perhaps ugly details were obliterated, and only the sad and moving outlines of the tragedy remained. And then he could think of all the tender and happy hours they two had known together, before parting and sorrow had been thought of; and to dwell on these things had been a luxury of gentle pain, marred only by the perverse questions and remarks of the child Madeleine. So that his lordship, fancying that this was all he should be called on to endure, had experienced a grave chastening and uplifting of the soul, together with a secret (and perhaps unconscious) sentiment of relief that the affair had passed off so easily.

But the affair had now assumed a far less comfortable complexion. In M. Jacques all that was harsh and unwelcome in Annette's fate lived again, while all the other side of it was in abeyance. The wrong of fourteen years ago, stripped of its mournful grace, started up before him to-day repulsive and shameful. The healing influence of time, to which he had trusted more than he was aware, all went for nothing; for worse than nothing, indeed, since here was a father who had doubtless brooded over his daughter's disgrace and injury until he had heaped up a mountain of revengeful malice much more inveterate than he could have felt at first. In view of these considerations it seemed to Lord Castlemere as if something not unlike an injustice had been committed against himself, for he remembered how, since that December day, now so far off, when he had received the sudden summons to leave Suncook with all haste and return to England—since that day of farewells, and of promises not destined to be kept, he had suffered enough in disappointments and depression, and annoyances small and great, to warrant him in thinking that thus he had done penance for his sins, and that for the sake of this they would be forgiven him. Often, in the midst of distress and gloom, had he solaced himself with the thought, 'This have I deserved; let me therefore endure it, that the debt be paid, and the remorse of it be taken away.' But, if his punishment were to begin now, then what was all the other suffering for? Did it not look as if Providence had stolen a march on him? As these reflections crossed Lord Castlemere's mind he was almost ready to be angry that he had borne his misfortunes with so much meekness!

However, this first flush of feeling was followed by a better one. His eyes rested on the old man before him, and recognised there a misfortune more poignant and of higher dignity than his own. And next, a tenderness came over him, to think that this was the very father of the woman he had once loved so well—the father of whom she had spoken so often, wondering whether he would forgive her; or, in more hopeful moods, looking forward to the time when everything should be explained and condoned, and they should all dwell together in happiness and freedom. 'And so it might have been,' thought Lord Castlemere, 'and Annette have been alive at this

moment, and this old man have been full of affection towards me instead of hating me, if I had only done thus and so instead of otherwise; and so I should have done could I have foreseen the end from the beginning.' Oh, if a wish could but recall the past, and give the man who sees the error of his ways a chance to begin again! But life is not a plaything, to be thrown aside and resumed at pleasure; but serious earnest—an experiment that comes to us once for all, as to immortal creatures, destined never twice to tread in the same footsteps, nor, like the conjuror's puppets, to figure over and over again in the same old drama. The shortest life is long enough to prove the metal of him who lives it, and a myriad repetitions could not make more of it.

'Then you are Jacques Malgrè,' said the Baron, after a long silence.

The Frenchman looked up, but his face was blank and unresponsive, and the fingers of the hands that hung upon his knees moved aimlessly.

'I will not insult you by asking your pardon; it is too late by fourteen years for that,' the Englishman continued. 'It may not be too late to do something, though. I suppose you can guess what brought me here. That I should see you never came into my mind; this is the first time we have ever met, and I hardly thought of you as anything but a name. I knew that Annette was dead, though not how nor when. So what I came for was,' he went on, getting to the point with an evident reluctance and difficulty, 'to find out whether —to ask whether Annette was a mother when she died?' He paused, and finally added, 'and if her child lived after her?'

'You did not know me, M. le Baron,' said the Frenchman, with a kind of creak coming through his voice now and then, as if the springs of it were wearing out; 'but you have been good enough to take it for granted that I knew you to be the thief who stole my child: you have spoken of pardon, or of compensation perhaps—I do not know. I am getting old, monsieur. . . . Well—yes—it is no matter: I recognised you, although, as you say, we had never met; but, unlike you, monsieur, I have thought of meeting you ever since I put my child in her grave. The idea of you has been with me even more than of her: you have been in my dreams; and in this very room. . . .' Here a sort of wildness began to stare out of his eyes, and his breath to labour in his throat. 'Do you know, Milord Castlemere,' he said, 'why I have admitted you to this room, into which no other visitor has entered?'

Lord Castlemere sat with an oppressed feeling, awaiting what disagreeable thing might be coming next.

'Listen, then,' continued Annette's father, shrilly and excitedly, and with that redundancy of gesticulation which the Anglo-Saxon smiles at as 'foreign':—'it is because each day since then I have called you to this place, and you have come! Aha! this is not our first talk together, Milord Castlemere. Your name, your face—those

I knew not; but my call was for you—for the soul of the man I hate; and you have come, for it was a call no soul can resist! Every day . . . and then I have insulted you, I have cursed you; I have expressed such things to you as there are not words to speak! and I have tortured you. . . . When you writhed with the torture, and wept, and besought for mercy, I laughed at you and mocked you! and I drew the knots tighter . . . but not to kill—no, no, no! for I should want you the next day and the next—always! We have been fine comrades, monsieur, since these many years. And now—' his voice began to waver again, and his eyes to grow dull and uncertain —'now you are here, it is true; but I find it in some manner different; I find myself—old!' At this point M. Jacques Malgrè stopped, and his face wore a bewildered expression. He seemed mutely to appeal to the very enemy at whom he had raved, to show him how to inflict in concrete reality those insults and tortures in which his diseased imagination had revelled.

Lord Castlemere, however, was by no means disposed to inflame still further the fantasies of his half-distracted host. Being a nobleman of great natural refinement and fastidiousness, he had been cruelly revolted by what had already occurred, and probably, indeed, would have been less inconvenienced by actual bodily assault and battery. The thought that he, a peer of England, and a man who in all his dealings, almost, had studied decency, honour, and respectability, should have been during a good part of a lifetime the object of boundless detestation to a person he had never seen—this reflection had given him a very painful shock. It affected him as an invasion of that moral privacy which even a criminal has a right to preserve; it made him feel as if he could never again retire into himself with any prospect of security or enjoyment: since he could never withdraw so far as not to find the grim and stark malevolence of this old Frenchman anticipating and ousting him. If hatred does not go deeper than love, at any rate it makes itself felt deeper.

Be that as it may, the Baron had no appetite for more ravings, and would have been glad to beat a retreat at once, had it not been indispensable that he should first get his hands upon the information for the sake of which he had travelled three thousand miles by sea and land. He looked at M. Malgrè, and was not sorry to observe that his last eruption of fury seemed to have left the volcano at least temporarily inert. On the other hand, there was nothing in what his lordship had to say that was likely to irritate the Frenchman, but rather the reverse; and, in any case, there was no one to take the trouble off his hands. He bent forward and looked his host mildly in the face.

'M. Jacques Malgrè,' he said, as if nothing unpleasant had taken place, 'there is still that matter about the existence of a child. You can tell me if any survived?'

'A child!' returned the other, slowly. 'Does Milord Castlemere think it probable that a child could live whose mother died, deserted and heart-broken, on the day it was born?'

'Then there is none!' Lord Castlemere exclaimed. There was a ring of relief in his voice; for it seemed to him that, upon the whole, this result was the one which he had desired. Of the two possible issues, it was perhaps the less unsatisfactory. It would save trouble, publicity, and a great deal of conceivable mortification and distress. Yes, it was better so! Lord Castlemere rose from his chair with a lightened brow, and thought of Madeleine. But for a certain unwelcome shadow of Madeleine's father in the background, the coast would have been quite clear. But this shadow had not obtruded itself for a long time; and, like other shadows, it might have lost itself ere this in the great shadow out of which no shadow reappears.

All this while M. Jacques Malgrè had been watching his visitor, and had noted the change in his expression, not without a partial divination of its cause.

'Are you going so soon?' M. le Baron, he inquired. 'Would it not interest you to hear something about the character and education of your son?'

The word seemed to strike through the delicately-built Englishman: his elbows came sharply to his sides with a spasmodic movement, and his lips became white. Following this, after a few moments, a rush of blood surcharged his face. There was some organic physical weakness in him. He made no reply to M. Malgrè, but glanced at him in a strange way, and dropped into his chair again.

Now all this puzzled M. Malgrè. He had been led to believe—not without reason as it appeared—that a son was what Lord Castlemere most desired. But the unmistakable relief which the latter had manifested when under the impression that no child survived, and, again, his disconcertment at the subsequent insinuation that there was one, seemed to show that there was more in the matter than had been suspected. Accordingly, as M. Malgrè found himself not yet prepared to do what would be most gratifying to the man he had so long busied himself with hating, he cast about to discover more precisely how the land lay. But he was overstrained, both bodily and mentally, by the excitement of the interview, and his mind, stumbling uncertainly between the past and the present, the real and the imaginary, could only occasionally catch a connected view of things. It is worth noting here, as a curious freak of fate, that during his moments of nervous prostration, when memory and self-command were least operative, M. Malgrè felt drawn towards Castlemere by an instinctive impulse of affection. He liked him without knowing why—a sort of elective affinity; so that if he could but have forgotten altogether why he did not like him, the atmosphere would have grown genial at once. But men seem to make it a point of honour to forget only those things which would lead to friendliness—so long, at least, as anything that may be worried into hostility remains attainable.

'Milord,' said the old man at length, 'you will understand that I know nothing of you, nor of what you have come here to do. When I lost my daughter, my whole purpose was to find her again; when I

found her, I could have wished that she had been already dead. She told me nothing of you by which I might discover you; now you come as if you wished to get something from me, but you do not tell me what it is. Unless you tell me all, I will not speak. It is you who should give to me, not I to you. Have you anything to give me, M. le Baron?'

'I may be able to give you some satisfaction, M. Malgrè,' the other answered. 'I can make you see that it was with no wish further to injure you that I came here. Monsieur,' he added after a pause, 'I am not an old man, as you see; yet my life may end at any moment. I have disease of the heart. One does not like to die with a heavier load than can be avoided on one's conscience. That is one thing that brought me over here. There were other reasons—but perhaps I had better take the events from the beginning.'

CHAPTER VIII.

Of moral and intellectual children-in-arms: of some of the dangers to which that condition is liable: of the vicissitudes of a younger brother and the inconvenience of natural affection.

WITHOUT prejudice to Lord Castlemere's ability to tell his own story in his own words, it seems advisable, under the circumstances, to summarise and arrange his statements. A man is seldom interested in those phases and particulars of his career which appear of most significance to his biographer. As long as he is alive he cannot help taking incomplete views of himself; whereas the historian (if only he have the patience to wait until the obituary has been published—a precaution, by the way, not seldom omitted in this hasty age) sees the proportions and bearings of things, and what may be curtailed or omitted, and what put in or developed.

The Honourable Floyd Vivian was the elder of two brothers, sons of the old statesman, Henry, twelfth Baron Castlemere. He was an intelligent child, but of a frail constitution; and it was thought for several years that he would not live to manhood, and that his younger, but bigger and stronger, brother would be the heir. Floyd struggled along, however, as delicate children sometimes do; he was the pet of the family, and his mother kept him from school lest he should injure his health, or be injured by some lack of tenderness and consideration in the older boys. So Floyd followed his studies at home with a tutor; and his quick parts made learning come easy to him. As he grew from a long-haired boyhood into a slender and fastidious young manhood, it occurred to him that Shelley was not only admirable as a poet, but desirable as a religious and social leader. He was conscious of bearing some personal resemblance to the author of the 'Revolt of Islam,' and he decided that he could not do better than take

up the career of the tragic young Radical at the point where the prow of the Italian felucca had cut it short. It was true that his talents lay not in the way of poetry, as he had ascertained by assiduous practice; but he had more than an average amount of artistic ability, and could sketch ingeniously both in water and oil colours. As a point of detail, not unworthy of attention, he habitually carried about a small volume of Æschylus in his coat pocket. His conversation was more or less distraught and preoccupied, according as he had time to remember to make it so; and soon after coming of age he repaired to Italy, and wandered about in search of a new Byron, to be his desperate companion.

All this was very much as it should be, and calls for no particular ridicule. The young nobleman was not a great original thinker, or genius of any kind; but he liked the words and deeds of those who did answer to this description, and cultivated his self-respect by imaginatively marching under their banner. Having the control of great wealth, he was pleased in advocating universal communism; and having enjoyed, by birth and education, all the advantages appertaining to established social order and morality, he was careful to dilate upon the obligation which every enlightened mind was under to trample all such sordid conventionalities under foot, and to allow no third party to mediate between himself and the Great First Cause, be that Cause what and where it might. In the cultivation of these pursuits Floyd Vivian passed his time very agreeably, and got into surprisingly little mischief.

Men of this kidney are very much like children-in-arms, carried about by their nurses, and mistaking the nurse's gait and stature for their own; while all the time they do not once get their feet upon solid earth. In rare instances they spring out of the nurse's arms, and attempt to do the trick for themselves, whereupon it goes hard with them; but generally they allow themselves to be borne aloft over the pavements and the gutters, and then take pride to themselves because their feet are not lame nor their shoes muddy. I shall not elucidate this figure further than to remark that Vivian, while mentally careering with his model hero over all possible and impossible realms of licence and experiment, lived, in his proper person, the most orderly and unaudacious of lives—and was only by fits and starts aware that he was so doing. When he did become aware of it, he would secretly rebuke himself, and call his shoes to account, as it were, for not being muddier. But what can one do when his blood and his intellect disagree? How arrange a compromise between the brain of a Mirabeau and the passions of a Newton? Suffice it to say, that the Honourable Mr. Floyd Vivian lived a life of the strictest respectability, and was not a little ashamed of it, when he thought of it.

In due course of time, no doubt—as generally happens with this kind of hybrid—the tendency of the body would have proved too much for that of the brain, and the heir of Castlemere would have quietly returned to his ancestral estates, and become a sound Tory and

member of the Established Church, like his father before him. But, as luck would have it, an event was to occur in his life which should altogether divert and agitate what might have been its commonplace and unimportant current. He was already on his way home from Italy, but chancing to pass through Paris, he made a short stay there. In the course of this residence he met, under rather peculiar circumstances, a certain lovely and bright-minded French girl, the daughter of a gentleman of considerable political weight, and of still higher philosophic renown. M. Jacques Malgrè, as this gentleman was named, happened at the moment to be absent on a diplomatic errand in Berlin, and Annette had been left under the charge of a literary lady, a cousin of her father's, and a person of advanced Radical opinions. The restraints usually exercised over the unmarried maidens of France were greatly relaxed in Annette Malgrè's case; and Vivian (who was travelling incognito as Mr. Floyd) was admitted to a freedom of intercourse with her more after the fashion of some of Georges Sand's fictitious worlds than of the priest-ridden era of Charles X. The young lady, who had a generous and impulsive nature and an affectionate heart, had become inoculated with odds and ends of the crude and rebellious philosophical systems (so-called) which were then fermenting in the air of Europe; and she and Mr. Floyd found no end of things to talk to each other about. And now a vision came before the rapt eyes of Shelley's baby-in-arms. He saw himself united to this girl—who admired his opinions because they were incomprehensible, and loved himself because he said he comprehended her—abandoning his rank and inheritance in England—concerning which his younger brother cared much more than he himself had ever professed to do—and flying to America, the mighty home of freedom and of the future, where he would found a race of transcendental communists, on the basis of eclecticism in morals and scepticism in religion, together with universal suffrage, female emancipation, free trade, grazing, and agriculture; or music, poetry, and painting as alternatives. This was the vision that the unlucky young English nobleman beheld; and, since fools are destroyed by the consequences of their folly, but never by the folly itself—therefore Floyd and Annette were able to put at least one part of the scheme into operation. They glided out of Paris, under the nose of the unsuspicious and infatuated female literary cousin, embarked in a sailing-vessel at Havre, and, after a prosperous voyage, were put ashore at Newburyport, Massachusetts. Thence they proceeded by a coasting-schooner to Suncook; and there, for a while, they were happy to the top of their bent.

At all events Annette was happy. One cannot be so sure about her companion. His nature was much less substantial and thoroughgoing than hers, and it is possible that even thus early he had begun to doubt whether he was staunch enough to carry the enterprise to an end. It is certain that he had played a double game with his family at home from the first. Instead of frankly announcing his new departure in life, he had written them a letter speaking of his

proposed visit to America as a mere extension of his European tour, and arranging to have his funds forwarded regularly as usual; while of Annette and of his relations with her he did not mention one word. For three or four months, however, they lived alone very comfortably, occupying an old red farm-house with a long sloping roof and a thick clustered chimney, and passing their time in strolling about the neighbourhood, painting pictures, reading poetry, and making love. As for their communistic projects, they left them in abeyance for the present; it would first be advisable to get used to the country, and learn something of the temper and prejudices of the inhabitants. Annette had no doubts or misgivings regarding the ultimate carrying out of the design; but Floyd must have known from the outset his incapacity for the work, and have suffered the secret and unavailing pains which conscious weakness brings.

Into the midst of this insecure Arcadia came at last a letter from the family in England. Old Lord Castlemere was dying, and Floyd must travel post-haste to stand beside his death-bed. Annette, who had had no suspicion until this moment that the man to whom she had given herself was any other than plain Floyd Vivian, was deeply perturbed by this communication. Whether Floyd were glad or sorry, who can tell? He applied himself to demonstrating to Annette, first, that it was indispensable that he should go; and secondly, that she must not accompany him. In her then state of health, so long and hurried a journey would be dangerous; moreover, matters might not move so smoothly as could be wished at home; and finally, why should she come, since she was comfortable here in the farmhouse under Mrs. Dudgeon's care, and he would surely be back before the date of her confinement arrived? Oh, yes, indeed, he would be back! Doubtless he meant it when he said it. The poor girl summoned up all her strength, and let him go; taking her thoughts and all her heart with him. She would not admit to herself a fear or a complaint when he was gone, and chatted very cheerfully with Mrs. Dudgeon; only, somehow, she always cried at night, which was very wrong and ungrateful of her. The wintry days passed uneventfully; she sat in the window of her chamber, sewing little shirts and knitting little socks, and glancing up every now and then across the grey eastern ocean, where many a ship went by, but none whose sails were set for her. The hour of her trial drew nearer and nearer; would she, after all, have to meet it alone? Many thoughts passed through her mind; perhaps some regrets—some confessions of error and of repentance—were amongst them; but nothing dimmed her love, nor caused her faith to waver.

Before going, Floyd had left with her money enough to support her comfortably for a year; and an arrangement had been entered into, according to which she was to send a letter to a certain address in London twice every month. In case of her being too ill to write herself, she was to get Mrs. Dudgeon to do it for her; but in case of

her death (a contingency, of course, not seriously to be thought of) no word was to be sent.

Seven times Annette wrote, and posted the letter with her own hands. The last letter was dated the 14th of March, and contained, amidst a web of loving words, some little tear-drops of gentle reproach and murmuring. She hoped he would not get this letter (she wrote) because, if he did, he would not be here in time to be the first to see—somebody whose name had not yet been decided on. It would make its appearance very soon now. Meanwhile, did Floyd long for her as much as she longed for him? She hoped he did; and yet she hoped he did not; for it was enough for one of them to be unhappy. Not that he must think of her as unhappy; she was in very good spirits; only it seemed rather lonely in the old house sometimes. But in a few days, if all went well, she would not be lonely any more! If Floyd did not take care—if he did not get back before long—he would find that a rival had supplanted him!—And then followed some sentences, the like of which all pure eyes have read or will read in their time; but which are not to be quoted here, or anywhere. And then there was a mark to show where a kiss had been put. Then a name—and then no more, on this side of eternity.

Now, it must be confessed that when Floyd Vivian (by that time thirteenth Baron Castlemere) received this letter, he was not on his way back to Suncook, but was in a very splendid mansion in London, and had just finished his toilet for dinner. His servant handed him the letter; he recognised the superscription, and being somewhat hurried, he put it in his pocket, to be read after dinner was over. At dinner he sat beside Lady Angora de Laine, one of the beauties of the season, and the conversation turned upon Shelley. Lord Castlemere considered him a somewhat overrated man; a graceful poet, but unsound and extravagant in his views. Look at his views on marriage, for example. Lady Angora mused and said, 'If all men had your ideas, Lord Castlemere! Fancy your making any mistake of that kind!' His lordship smiled a little, and sighed, and changed the conversation. There was scarcely any one at table but Lady Angora—the daughter of an old friend of the family; for they were still in the thick of their mourning for the old lord. The next day Lord Castlemere went down to the country and remained ten days; he thought several times of the unread letter which had been left behind in London with his evening dress; but he could not very well send for it. By the time he went up to town again, there would be another awaiting him. By-and-by he went up, and found the old letter; but the new one had not arrived yet. Another fortnight passed by, and still it did not arrive. The fortnight succeeding that was spent by Lord Castlemere in a secret fever of suspense, of fear, of—hope? Well, be that as it may, no letter came, either then or at any future time. But, as long as for a year afterwards, he said to himself occasionally, 'I shall go to America as soon as I can get the

time, and see——' But it is very difficult for a young peer, just making his entrance into political life, to find opportunity for a vague expedition to a semi-barbarous country on the other side of the Atlantic. Moreover, there was Lady Angora, a most beautiful girl, and a splendid match; she could not endure to hear about America, and thought it very courageous of Lord Castlemere to have ever brought himself to go there. In the June following—eighteen months from the time that Floyd Vivian set sail from New England —Lord Castlemere and Lady Angora were married, to the great delight of their friends and of society. It was a great comfort that the young lord should have settled himself in life so advantageously, and so early.

In fact, there can be few modes of existence more easy and agreeable than that upon which he had fallen; the only disturbing element, so far as appeared, being that unlucky younger brother of his, who had not yet become reconciled to the idea of Floyd's having undertaken to grow up and appropriate the title and forty thousand a year; while he, a much sounder and more sensible man, was forced to go and bury himself in a beggarly church living, worth barely six hundred. This younger brother deserves more mention than has thus far been accorded to him. He was, in most ways, a foil to Floyd. He had a long heavy face, a large nose, black hair and brows; in person he was powerful and rather ponderous; his voice was smooth and fluent, and, like Richard the Third, he had great confidence in the persuasiveness of his tongue. He was a man of ambitions rather personal than ideal; he liked to prove himself more subtle and sharp-sighted than the people with whom he came in contact; to make a fool of his interlocutor before his face was a delight to him. He inherited from his parents some moral scruples and a bias towards respectability; but he early set to work to correct these drawbacks to success, and by dint of much reasoning, carried on upon a basis of common sense and utilitarianism, he contrived, while still a young man, to bring about his moral emancipation. He saw that society was selfish, and that the sacrifices it required from the individual, although seeming to be in the interests of his own salvation, were in reality but the indispensable conditions of its own aggregate prosperity and cohesion. 'Now, society never gave up anything for my good,' argued this subtle mind, 'therefore, why should I give up anything for the good of society? Doubtless, society is stronger than I am, if I fight with it on even ground; but this superior strength is the very thing which justifies me in taking every advantage I can of it. I will seem to yield and to conform; but in reality I will pursue my own profit at the expense of anything or everything that may stand in my way.' This line of argument always appears to the reasoner to postulate exceptional enlightenment on his part, and it has, consequently, the great initial merit of putting him in good conceit with himself at the outset. For the rest, it resembles other theories, when reduced to practice, in sometimes being successful and

sometimes failing; the causes of success and failure lying, in this as in other matters, quite outside of the philosophic deserts of the scheme itself. 'Tis not in mortals to command success;' 'The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley;' such proverbial sentences, of which there are hundreds in every language, indicate the catholic acknowledgment on mankind's part that Luck is the one intractable and incalculable element in human affairs. The man whom we are considering would no doubt join in this acknowledgment; but, like other men, only after his personal experience had made the demonstration. It would then happen, of course, that the luck which favoured him would appear as the result of his sagacity, while the luck that thwarted him would appear as a senseless and perverse accident. It is just possible that neither of these conclusions may represent the whole truth; it seems inevitable that both of them cannot. As for the younger brother of Lord Castlemere, he sometimes prevailed, and sometimes the contrary; and it so chanced that his winnings were generally in trifling matters, and his losses in important ones.

He had a living in one of the northern counties of England; and being a man of some real ability, of fair scholarship, and of ingratiating address, not to speak of those involuntary and inarticulate virtues which invest even the secondary offshoots of nobility, he got a very fair start. He meditated achieving high preferment; and he gave a good deal of thought to the pretensions and prospects of the Romish Church, with the idea that a time might come when it would suit his interests to cross the line which has been drawn, or has drawn itself, between English ritualism and the Pope. He cultivated society, and was popular in it. Although not exactly a handsome man, even in his best years, he exercised a curious influence over women; they felt the masculine strength that underlay his smoothness, and were magnetised by the stroking which the privilege of his spiritual calling enabled them to give their souls. A woman who has deliberately made up her mind to be religious, in the sense of yielding obedience to the admonitions and dictates of the Church, and who imagines herself to acquire personal sanctity and moral elevation therefrom, must, in proportion to the sincerity of her persuasions, fall more or less under the sway of whatever priest has the will to rule her, and a certain knack of management. The reverend gentleman whom we are discussing owned these qualifications, and was, moreover, neither too old nor too ascetic to affect female society for other than ambitious or ecclesiastical reasons. If he had been endowed with the prudence and impassivity of a calculating machine, he might in time have made a fortunate marriage and become a pillar and light of the Church; but, inasmuch as he had omitted to allow for the weight of human passions in the scale, a catastrophe presently took place. The exact nature of this event is not known; it was not allowed to make the noise or to attain the publicity that it might have done under other circumstances; but the result was that the incumbent was obliged to

give up his living, and to seek retirement on the Continent. It was then found that he had, during his incumbency, lived in a style more in accordance with the means he hoped to obtain than with those he actually possessed; and the consequent debts were paid by Lord Castlemere, in order to avoid scandal. His lordship further agreed to pay his brother a certain fixed sum per annum, in consideration whereof the latter was to continue to live abroad, and to abstain from making himself obnoxious to the family. For several years this arrangement appeared to work pretty well; though the banished brother was continually applying for sums of money to meet unexpected contingencies, and was a constant source of uneasiness to his lordship, who was above measure sensitive on the score of the family honour, and fearful lest his brother, in revenge for some alleged act of illiberality, should create some new and more outrageous scandal. For a time, however, nothing worse happened than the marriage of the ex-rector with a person of very questionable eligibility, a Belgian Jewess by birth, and an actress (or something equally undesirable) by profession. A daughter was born of this marriage, and the mother soon afterwards died. Some three or four years later the father and widower addressed a long letter to Lord Castlemere, setting forth his inability to bring up and educate the child in a manner befitting its name, and requesting that it might be allowed a home at Castlemere.

Now, it was not on the face of it likely that this proposition would be entertained; nevertheless circumstances caused it to meet with favour beyond expectation. For Lord Castlemere's own matrimonial experience had not been a happy one. His wife had lately died, after bearing him three children, one of whom was still-born, while the other two were victims of an epidemic; her ability to promote connubial felicity had not been in other respects noticeable; and it had even been hinted that her husband had found her a very difficult person to get on with. At all events, the noble household was now somewhat forlorn, and the idea of having a little girl to cheer it up was therefore not so unwelcome as it might otherwise have been. Lord Castlemere wrote that he would take the child upon the following conditions: that if, at the expiration of a year she had not proved herself available, she was to be returned to her father; that if, on the contrary, she did prove available, she was to be regarded as the adopted daughter and heiress of the family (in default of direct heirs), and finally, that the father was in that case to abandon all present and future claim to her, under penalty of forfeiting his present allowance. To these conditions, after some demurs and modifications, the father assented; and little Madeleine made her appearance at Castlemere. A very odd little creature she was; but not so impracticable as might have been supposed, and with an evident capacity for receiving cultivation and ideas. In fact, there was a great deal of the innate lady in her, which Lord Castlemere put to the credit of the Vivian blood; there were also symptoms of eccentricity, or something strange and unusual, which he laid to the account of her mother, and intended to

educate out of his little niece. Before the probationary year had expired, Miss Madeleine Vivian had not only secured her permanent footing in the household, but she had become the idol of its master, and there was nothing he would not do for her; and she had achieved this conquest (in so far as it was explicable at all), far less by virtue of her Vivianship than by that very eccentricity or independent flavour of character which he had purposed to eradicate. Her whims and fantastical perversity were his delight, and he would allow no one to thwart her. On her side, she did not betray any ardour of affection for him, and made him feel the weight of her resentment whenever anything happened to displease her; at the same time she never expressed any wish to go back to her father, or solicitude for his welfare, and in the course of a few years it was plain that she had forgotten all about him. She would not, however, save occasionally, and a special favour, call Lord Castlemere 'father,' though it was his desire that she should habitually do so; she seemed quite able and willing to dispense with parents altogether. No little lady of under ten years of age in England was more mistress of herself, and all around her, than was the little lady of Castlemere.

It was about this period that some signs of feebleness in Lord Castlemere's bodily condition compelled him to face the possibility of having to leave his barony and the world, and explore a wholly unknown and presumably different sphere of life. His physicians told him that he might last as long as anybody; but that Providence might be so inconsiderate as to remove him at any time with little or no warning. Meditating upon this contingency, his lordship was naturally led to discuss with himself the future disposal of his great estates; and the more he thought about the matter, the more unsettled and vacillating did his mind become.

The position in which he stood was something like this. The Castlemere estates, during the last four hundred years, had descended from father to eldest son, the supply of direct male heirs having been equal to the demand throughout that long period. In the event, however, of the failure of such heirs, the estates might be alienated, or disposed of as the holder saw fit. Now, the present baron was the first in his line to whom this unwelcome privilege would seem to have accrued. He had no son by Lady Castlemere; and assuming this to mean that he had no son at all, it is evident that he might devise his property to whomsoever he pleased. It was no less evident that he would have most indulged his own inclinations by constituting Madeleine his sole heiress; and so he would have done, but for two considerations. The first was, that Madeleine's father was extremely likely to survive his elder brother; and this detrimental father would be certain to prey and fatten upon the property so soon as the daughter became the owner of it. She might be legally restrained from making it or any part of it bodily over to him; but she could not be prevented from giving him money to any amount, and the hospitality of bed and board. There was no doubt, in short, that this disreputable clergy-

man would make a bee-line for Castlemere the moment the present lord of it was dead; and then, unless Madeleine were different from the generality of daughters, the result would be practically the same as if he, and not Madeleine, had been the devisee. Some expedient for the mitigation of this nuisance might perhaps be hit upon, but there was no complete safeguard against it; and it formed the sole objection to the heirship of Madeleine which Lord Castlemere (but for the second of the two considerations mentioned above) would have admitted.

What, then, was this second consideration? That was the very question which suggested itself to the mind of M. Jacques Malgrè when the gentleman sitting opposite him got to this point of the story. Whatever it was, it had been powerful enough to induce him to relinquish his insular comforts for a time, and to retrace with his adopted daughter the unsuspected footsteps of his youth.

CHAPTER IX.

A reminiscence of St. Augustine: a confession: preceded by a pair of old duelling pistols: a bundle of documents: a parting: and a cloudy sky.

If the reader has got the measure of Lord Castlemere's character from such hints of it as were conveyed in the last chapter, he will not be unprepared for something, the discovery of which took M. Jacques (whose estimate of human nature was perhaps less charitable than it might have been) entirely by surprise. For some unexplained reason, men are fond of appearing consistent, even in their iniquities: if they have acquired, whether deservedly or not, a reputation for a certain quality of behaviour, they will take a pride in acting up to that reputation; or in representing themselves to have acted up to it, if by chance a spasm of good sense or conscience should have induced them to act otherwise. Saint Augustine, speaking of that interesting period of his life when he was a dissipated young fellow about town, says that he occasionally used to boast himself to his companions of excesses which he had never committed: and if the fact of his not having committed them were found out, he would feel ashamed. The saint appears to think that this was exceptionally bad conduct on his part; whereas had he been half as inquisitive about other men's souls as about his own, a suspicion might have dawned upon him that he was not the only fool who had fallen into the same folly. Now, Lord Castlemere had long ago recognised the inadequacy of Shelley to be his guide and philosopher; nevertheless, the Shelley phase of his life bore to him, in the retrospect, a certain completeness and raciness of aspect which even his regenerate era was loth to detract from. The episode of his connection with Annette, and their flight to America,

was not only the most romantic episode of his career, but (assuming Shelley to have been the defier of all laws human and Divine that his age popularly believed him to be) it was the most Shelley-like: and if anyone had had the hardihood to throw doubts upon the sincerity—while it lasted—of Lord Castlemere's Shelleyism, his lordship, if he had not been tongue-tied by other considerations, would have been apt to repel the insinuation by a reference to this ill-advised and tragic adventure. And yet no one was so well aware as Lord Castlemere that if the whole truth were known, he would appear in a much less lurid, and more commonplace and respectable, light.

The affair was, indeed, bad enough at its best; but the badness was of a weak and timid, not of a bold and Satanic, type. Lord Castlemere had kept his secret well during all these years; but it may be doubted whether he would have been quite so reticent had the truth been of a more frankly damning nature than it was. Men are more afraid of the charge of weakness than of the conviction of sin: the reason perhaps being that weakness would be sin if it dared; and that its forbearance is due rather to an awe of society, than to the love of good. When, therefore, M. Jacques Malgrè asked Lord Castlemere why he had taken the trouble to come to America to make inquiries about an illegitimate child, who could only inherit by a special dispensation of the law in his favour?—his lordship coloured and hesitated.

The old Frenchman resumed: 'I will now admit to you, M. le Baron, that a child of yours exists, and that he has had the shelter of my roof, whenever he required it, from the time of his birth. But what is that to you? You know him not; you have no love for him, nor he for you. Why do you wish to force upon him a fortune which he cannot claim, and which he would never miss? Give it rather to this adopted daughter of yours, for whom you have an affection; and leave my grandson and me unbound by any—obligations!' To the last word M. Malgrè lent an emphasis of elaborate sarcasm, as if to remind himself as well as the Baron that there was no peace between them.

'But I suppose you love your grandson?' the Baron said, not noticing the satire otherwise than by an uneasy movement in his chair. 'He is not too old to receive an education to fit him for as great a career as any man could hope for. Come, monsieur, do not let your resentment against me prejudice his best interests. Remember that he is Annette's son as well as mine.'

'I have never forgotten it, M. le Baron,' the Frenchman replied, grimly; 'and both he and I have suffered for it. Had he been her child only, or hers by an honest marriage, I would have loved him with my best love. But at the moment when I would have embraced him for her sake, the thought of him who destroyed her rose in my heart, and told me that this boy had in his veins the blood of the seducer as well as of the victim. Many a time, monsieur, I could have strangled him with one hand, while I gave him my heart with

the other!' As he said this, the old man's eyes shone strangely. 'It is a devilish thing that you have done,' he continued, in a more passionate key. 'You have mixed love and hate together in the person of an innocent child! You have poisoned all that should have made my old age serene and happy! There is no sweeter thing than to teach the child you love what may make him wise and strong: but when I would do this, I thought "Shall I do good to the son of my enemy?" and I said I would not. Often I have spoken cruel words to him—he knew not what they meant; but they have turned him away from me; I shall end my life here alone! And now you come to offer him wealth and a name—the name of him who was his mother's ruin!' Here the Frenchman stood up, confronting the other with an air of stern and formal dignity. 'M. le Baron de Castlemere,' he said, 'I do not accept your offer. It is not by the gift of money and rank that you can atone for this wrong. But if you wish to give my grandson to me, with your part in him wiped out, so that I may take him to my breast, and feel that he is all mine—then, monsieur, do me the favour first to take this pistol.' He held an old-fashioned duelling-pistol towards Lord Castlemere as he spoke, retaining the mate to it in his other hand. 'This is not the place nor the country, monsieur,' he added, 'where the etiquette of an affair like this can be observed. But it is enough for honour that we face each other here alone, with no advantage on either side. Since fourteen years I have kept these weapons, in the hope that a day would come to use them. If you prefer it, M. le Baron, we will stand outside the house; though this room appears to me very suitable. You yourself shall give the word . . .'

For the first time during the interview the Englishman smiled. It was not so much that he was amused by the stiff and antique courtesy with which the Frenchman ornamented his deadly proposal; or that the absurdity of this method of recompensing poor M. Malgrè for the sufferings which he had caused him, was especially present to his mind. But he felt the relief of a man not subject to bodily fear, at having the strain shifted from the mental to the physical region of sensation. Any man can take a bullet: the process is a simple one and quickly performed; and certainly the wound does not rankle so long or so virulently as many a tongue-driven missile may do. It is even possible that Lord Castlemere may have been tempted for a moment to do as M. Malgrè suggested; to those coloured with a morbid genius for moral casuistry, the rough and ready way, when it presents itself, may offer almost irresistible allurements. But a second thought controlled this impulse.

'I cannot consent to run the risk of taking your life, monsieur,' he said, putting the pistol down on the table; 'but after I have told you of something of which you seem to have no suspicion, I shall not object to your pistolling me if you choose: so far as I can see I might as well come to an end now as any time.'

'What have you to tell me, milord?' the other demanded, with

an accent of anxiety in his voice, though his demeanour was almost unchanged.

'Your daughter was married to me; she was my lawful wife, and our son is the legitimate heir of Castlemere,' replied his lordship, speaking rapidly and breathing short. Then he got up from his chair and leaned with his hand upon the back of it.

The Frenchman's face puckered up, a tremor passed through his body; for several moments he seemed unable to use his voice. When at length it came it had a shrill, pithless sound.

'What you tell me is not true,' he began. 'You said it because you were afraid—bah! no—— But you were jesting, monsieur: in pity give me the assurance that you were jesting! Body of God! it cannot be true!'

'Are you sorry to learn that your daughter's honour was pure, M. Malgrè?' the Englishman inquired curiously. 'Here is the certificate of our marriage, signed and dated at Paris on the day previous to our starting for Havre.'

He took a bundle of papers from his pocket, and selecting one from amongst them handed it to the Frenchman, who glanced at it, and let it fall on the table. He then moved to his chair in a tottering way, and slouched down into it, like a man whose stamina has gone from him. He sat with his arms lying nervelessly in front of him on the table, and a piteous contraction of the brow and fall of the mouth.

Lord Castlemere, having had in view his own attitude in the matter rather than Annette's, had anticipated an outburst against his long-sustained suppression of the fact, and perhaps some fierce reflections on the risk he had run of committing bigamy. The truth was, however, that M. Malgrè was not thinking of his lordship at all, and was profoundly indifferent as to the nature or degree of his moral obliquity. The sole subject of the old man's thoughts, and that which crushed him down, was the wretched and irrevocable injustice that he himself had done his daughter's memory ever since her death. He had cursed her and denied her all forgiveness, and all the while she had been innocent. He had cast her out from his heart as a dishonour to his name, and she had not dishonoured it. He had made her son the scapegoat of his baffled resentment, when the boy should have been the sweet consolation of his loss. Finally, he had brought himself to be a poor, spiteful recluse and exile, at odds with the world, and living only in the vague hope of wreaking a fruitless revenge; and now, at the moment when he fancied the revenge was within his grasp, the substance of it vanished into thin air. All this was a terrible blow to M. Malgrè, and left him no stomach for scolding. 'Annette! Annette! Annette!' was the remorseful burden of his soul. He thought of her grave, over which his insane pride had suffered him to put no loving inscription, nor to visit it save by stealth and empty-handed; and of the room in which she died—but of that he scarcely dared to think. The vital and characteristic part of the man wandered apart in these

forlorn musings; and so much as remained to listen to Lord Castlemere was meek and pliable to excess. As for the pistols, they had become unknown instruments, relics of some forgotten age. Forgotten, too, was the presence, on the other side of the partition dividing the study from the adjoining room, of the reverend gentleman with black eyebrows and whiskers, who evinced such a lively desire to get the future John, fourteenth Baron Castlemere, out of the way. And yet the partition was rather a thin one.

'Well, then,' said his lordship (who had previously said several other things, which M. Malgrè had heard, perhaps, but without comprehending them), 'I will see the boy in your presence to-morrow morning. With this certificate of marriage, and the certificate of the child's birth, which you have, his identity is sufficiently established.'

'Yes, yes; no—assuredly,' murmured M. Malgrè. 'Here is the paper of his birth, monsieur; I always carry it about with me: accept it, monsieur. Yes—yes; to-morrow.'

'In order to put the matter beyond suspicion,' Lord Castlemere continued, 'I had a will drawn up—two wills, in fact. Here they are. The first, as you see, is drawn in favour of my niece and adopted daughter, Madeleine. It was to be used in case no direct heir should be forthcoming, and provides for her inheriting the estates on the completion of her twenty-first year. This second instrument—which, as you see, is dated one month later than the first—gives the property to my son in due succession, subject to a lien thereon to the amount of one thousand per annum to Madeleine during her life. It was my hope that the two might marry, but nothing of that kind is here suggested, lest by seeming to force their inclination we should discourage it. You understand me, M. Malgrè?'

'Assuredly, monsieur; we should discourage it.'

'Well, I will leave all the papers with you, for you to look over at your leisure. I confess, M. Malgrè, that I should have preferred to see this property go unreservedly to my niece, in spite of the drawbacks attending her tenure; but I could not face the possibility of her title being hereafter challenged; and besides—I did not wish to add wrong to wrong. This affair has caused me great anxiety and unhappiness from the beginning.'

His lordship hesitated, as if he had other words to say, but the Frenchman was so plainly not interested in his confessions that he changed his mind. Upon the whole he was not sorry that the other's preoccupation prevented him from appreciating the rather feeble and ineffective figure which he was himself conscious of cutting. And this was the end of fourteen years of secret humiliation and suspense on one side, and of corroding rage and gratuitous misanthropy on the other!

'I will take my leave of you for the present, M. Malgrè,' Lord Castlemere said, turning to the door. 'To-morrow we will settle what remains of this affair. I think my little girl is upstairs,

monsieur,' he added abruptly, turning again and holding out his hand; 'don't you think that, after all, we might become friends?'

'Assuredly, M. le Baron—to-morrow!' returned the Frenchman, not changing his expression or moving from his place.

So the two men parted without having shaken hands. In the passage Lord Castlemere called to his niece, and she came down, with her squirrel under her arm; she had made better friends with it than her uncle had done with M. Malgrè, and would not be parted from it. His lordship bent down and kissed her on the forehead, then they went out of the house hand in hand.

Two or three minutes afterwards a burly, black-garmented figure issued from the doorway, glanced to the right and left, and then went hastily down the lane in the same direction that the two others had taken. The easterly breeze had driven a flock of clouds across the sky, and it was already quite dark.

CHAPTER X.

In which Uncle Floyd's absent-mindedness becomes irrevocable: Madeleine changes hands: and Murdoch has reason to congratulate himself.

WHEN Madeleine and Uncle Floyd had proceeded some distance along the lane, they came to a little rising ground. The lane was bordered on each side by a stone wall, of the same kind as that which surrounded Mossy Jakes's field; and a straggling row of apple-trees was planted along both these walls, and so close to them that, in the apple-season, some of the apples used to drop into the road, and be there picked up and devoured by the errant youth of Suncook. But no trees grew on the rising ground, and from the summit thereof there was a fine outlook, south-eastwards, to the sea. When the two wayfarers reached this point, Uncle Floyd proposed that they should stop for a few minutes, and rest. Madeleine, who was used to her uncle becoming tired at unexpected moments, and when he had really done nothing enough to tire anybody, offered no objection to his proposal; especially as she wished to have some fun with the squirrel, which she could not do so well while she was walking.

The evening was warm, and there was only a slight movement in the air. Though it was dark overhead, and round about, yet on the eastern horizon there was a dim belt of brightness; for there the moon was just about to rise. Now that the sounds of the day were over, the plunging of the sea along the beach was distinctly audible, and seemed so near, that you could distinguish the breaking of the separate waves. A bird of some kind, with a long, melancholy note, was calling from the marshy land. As if in answer to it there came a halloo from the village; but this was not repeated, and the cry of

the bird went on at intervals. It seemed to expect an answer of another kind.

Uncle Floyd had seated himself upon a flat stone, which was placed in such a position as to allow him to rest his shoulders against the bulk of the wall. He sat negligently, like a tired man. And in truth he was very weary: he felt like one who has travelled far over fatiguing ways, and thinks the time has come to pause. He would gladly have prolonged his rest here for a long while. He had reached a sort of turning-point in his life, and had attained higher ground than any he had traversed for a long time back. He hoped to mount higher still in the future; but for the present he wished to pause—to look back over the past, and to take his breath for what might be to come. And what was to come? Lord Castlemere sighed, yet he was not sad; but a peculiar stillness was settling over his mind—a dusky repose unlike anything he had known before. It resembled this summer evening, dark and pleasant, with a brightness of the coming moon beyond the verge of the ocean, towards which his face was set. The call of the bird from the unseen marshes was but the echo of a voice that called in his own soul. He could not look forward, and imagine himself continuing to act in the world; or rather, he had an inward sense that the future and the present were one, and that the past was in them. This world, which had seemed so obvious and important—was it really anything? Was it a finality? Lord Castlemere smiled, not with his lips, but in some inward region of his being. He fancied himself seeing through a pretence—tawdry but plausible, which had long deceived him, and many others with him. It had driven him to do things which had better have been left undone. Only those things which had been done in defiance of this plausible pretence now appeared to have been worth *doing*; and they were not many. 'If I could only tell men the truth that I see now!' thought he. Then his reflections took a deeper turn. 'The heart of man,' he thought, 'has not been given here to meet with the accident of threescore years and ten, and perish of it. The truth that I see will be known; for I am like a wave of the sea—nothing that I really am is myself. In a moment I shall lapse upon the shore and cease; but that which filled me flows on in the common ocean of our nature, and is never lost . . . . Madeleine, give me your hand, my child.'

'I cannot,' replied Madeleine; 'I am holding my squirrel.'

Uncle Floyd's hand fell by his side. There was a pause. A slight spasm passed across Uncle Floyd's face, which was faintly illuminated by the eastern brightness. Then his features assumed an aspect of profounder repose, and his eyelids drooped.

'Papa,' said Madeleine at length, 'let us go home now. I do not like the noise that bird makes. Have you not rested enough?'

It seemed that he had not, for he made no reply.

'I will give you my hand now,' said Madeleine; 'do come! There is a man coming along the lane, and he frightens me.'

The man of whom she spoke was then within a rod or two of them; he approached, and stood before them. He was dressed in black, and had long black whiskers; but Madeleine could not distinguish his features, for such light as there was was behind him. She pressed close to her uncle's side, and laid her arm round his neck.

'Good-evening, Floyd!' said the man; and then, as the other made no answer, he continued, 'Come, you're not going to cut your own brother, are you?'

'Do you suppose we believe that you are his brother?' demanded Madeleine, resentfully.

'Well, Maddey, it's hardly to be expected that you should be wise enough to know your own father, though you have grown so tall since I saw you last,' returned the man, with a short laugh; 'but really, Floyd, it is too absurd of you! I mean no harm, man; and you can't be more astonished than I am at our meeting here. But you see I found you out; and I'm bound to tell you that I'm not going to see my poor little chance spoiled by this by-blow of yours. It's not a fair thing, you know. So you must— What ails the man? Asleep?'

'If he is asleep, you have no right to wake him,' said Madeleine.

By this time the moon had mounted above the horizon, and its light rested upon Uncle Floyd's face. The man in black stooped down, and thrust his own face close to that of the other. Then he touched his hand. The next moment he rose erect, with an odd sound in his throat.

He stepped back a few paces, and at first seemed inclined to go away at once. But after standing a little while, and drawing a heavy breath or two, he came forward again, and spoke in a lowered tone to the child.

'Come here, Madeleine,' he said. 'Don't be afraid of me—I won't hurt you. Your uncle is—he must not be disturbed. He is very ill; we must go and find a doctor. I am your father, my dear—I am Murdoch Vivian. We must lose no time.'

'If you are my father, why do not I know you?' the child inquired, doubtfully.

'Never mind; you will remember me by and by, perhaps. Come with me now.' He held out his hand.

'Uncle Floyd, shall I go with him? Is he my father?' she asked, bending towards him who sat there, to meet his eyes.

'He can't answer you .... For God's sake, child, don't keep me waiting here any longer!' said Murdoch Vivian, in a voice that had a shudder in it.

'Why are you afraid? You were not afraid at first,' said Madeleine. Then she looked again at Lord Castlemere, who sat plunged in such deep forgetfulness, and wholly still; and something in the aspect of his white countenance, now clearly lighted by the moon, caused her to shrink away from him. Something that was awful had come over this usually pleasant uncle of hers, who had loved her so

much, and whom she had liked, but had never thought very highly of. To outward seeming this still was he; and yet it was certainly not he, but some cold stranger, terribly like him. The mystery of this invisible but appalling change terrified the child; it was the first great reality she had known, and she understood it no more than we—any of us—understand realities, being brought up to regard only appearances. And, since she was also unaccustomed to it, it subdued her courage—a predicament from which our brisk familiarity with unknowable things gradually frees us.

In comparison with this fear, the aversion she had felt for the man who called himself her father lost its colour; for now he and she had common cause together, as it were. She went to him, therefore, though she would not take his hand; and when he started off down the lane towards the house, she followed him. But after going a little way she began to run; and overtaking the man, she clutched the skirt of his coat with her little hand.

'He is coming after us,' she whimpered.

The man started violently, and turned. 'What? Who?' he cried in a breathless voice. For a moment he peered fearfully into the darkness behind them, straining his eyes, and listening. But no sound of footstep or movement of advancing form was there.

'You scared me, child,' he said at last, shrugging his shoulders. 'You mustn't have such nervous fancies. There is nothing. Come along.'

'He seemed to come after me,' she repeated, her little teeth chattering. 'What made him be so still? It was never so before.'

'There, there—never mind!' he said, grasping her hand and hurrying onward. 'God knows how it happened,' he went on to himself in a muttering tone. 'It's just as well, I suppose; but I would rather not have seen it—just then! Is this luck? It has been long coming, and now it has an ugly look. But one must make the best of things. Poor Floyd! he is well out of it. Now, if I can manage with this old French tartar, we shall be safe, and Master Jack may shoot his arrows here till the Day of Judgment, if he likes! Yes, I've been badly used from the start; it's time I had my turn.'

Encouraged by these reflections, and by the distance which by this time separated him from the lonely figure sitting in the darkness on the summit of the little rise, the Reverend Murdoch Vivian approached the old red house, which now looked black beneath the shadow of the elm. Leaving Madeleine beneath the porch, with strict orders to stay there until he came back, he walked cautiously round the corner of the building. All the windows of the lower story were dark; but in a window overhead there was a light, and a shadow moving on the blind. Reassured by this, the clergyman returned to the porch, where the child was crouched in a corner with the squirrel clasped in her arms, and softly entered the house. He felt his way along the dark passage until he came to the second door on the right, which was ajar. Slipping in here, he stepped up to the table, upon which he could just

distinguish a number of papers lying. Two of these were large documents, written on some tough substance that felt like parchment. There were two others, which were evidently papers. He carried all four to the window, through which a ray of moonlight was beginning to fall. After studying them closely for a minute or two, he replaced one of them upon the table, and put the others into the metal case which he carried slung over his shoulder. The sound of a tread overhead, causing a slight jar of the ancient framework of the building, made him pause and listen. The door above opened and closed, and the step began to descend the stairs. Mossy Jakes was coming down, and he was carrying a lamp with him, as was evident by the gleam that was visible through the half-open door. The staircase was so situated that if the clergyman attempted to get out, he would meet the Frenchman face to face. He waited, therefore, in the hope that the old gentleman might not be going to enter the study. But in this he was disappointed. He heard Mossy Jakes, on reaching the foot of the stairs, proceed slowly along the passage, and when he got to the door he pushed it open and came in. Murdoch Vivian was unable to take measures for concealing himself, nor did the room afford any facilities for so doing. Consequently there was nothing for it but to stand where he was, and risk what might happen.

The old Frenchman appeared with the lamp in his left hand, and carrying over his right arm a heap of dusty and moth-eaten garments, which had manifestly belonged to a woman. There was a rich satin pelisse, trimmed and lined with fur, an embroidered robe with lace about it, a quaintly shaped bonnet, and a pair of small wrinkled gloves. He looked straight at Murdoch; but there was in his eyes a vacant, or rather an absorbed expression, as of one whose sight has temporarily ceased to inform him of aught save the objects of his thought. As he came forward, Murdoch moved to one side (he had been standing in front of the table), and the other set down his lamp, and laid the garments reverently upon the arm-chair. After regarding them for a short time with the same intently absorbed gaze, he turned towards the wall where the darkened portrait hung. Taking hold of the frame with his bony hands, he detached it from the fastenings, and deposited the picture carefully upon the table. From the shelf underneath the bookcase he selected a bottle containing a brownish liquid, uncorked it, and poured out a little of the liquid upon the canvas. Then with a cloth he rubbed over the surface, and Murdoch perceived that the darkness which overspread the design was disappearing, having been caused, not by age, as might have been supposed, but by painting it over with some kind of semi-opaque varnish. As the veil was thus removed a face began to be revealed, starting out from the gloom with almost the effect of a living countenance. The features were those of an extremely lovely young girl, apparently about eighteen years of age, with soft brown hair and delicate complexion. The expression was one of singular sweetness and happiness; there was no definite smile, but the

lightsomeness of youthful gaiety seemed to shine forth from every part. At the same time there was a depth and intelligence in the glance that preserved it from the charge of superficiality. Here was pictured the embodiment of a soul created to enjoy all delights both of mind and heart; such a woman as might render a man's life blessed, cheering him and inspiring him in sorrow or defeat, sympathising with his success and pleasure, and increasing them, loving him at all times with a love that time could only ripen and make more tender. With her as his wife, a man might find all that was best and purest in the world at his own hearthstone, so that in forsaking the world for her sake he would gain whatever was worth having in it. To neglect such a woman, to weary of her, to desert her, would be grotesque impossibilities. Nor was she formed for grief or hardship.

When Mossy Jakes had finished restoring this portrait, he took it once more in his arms, and set it upright on the chair where the faded garments lay. The effect of this conjunction was unexpected and strange; it was somewhat as if, from the decayed and dusty cerements of the dead, had arisen in undiminished freshness and beauty the living untroubled soul over which death and time could not prevail. The contrast had something ghostly in it, and would appear mournful or the reverse to the beholder according as he were or were not disposed to believe in a life of compensation and fulfilment beyond the grave. In the former case, the mortality symbolised by the poor moth-eaten clothes was triumphed over by the apparition of the unshadowed and unsullied spirit; in the latter, the bright promise of the face was mocked and falsified by the forlorn rottenness of the relics which survived it. For old Mossy Jakes, however, the spectacle possessed still another and more pathetic aspect. When the late knowledge of the truth had overtaken him, he had gathered together those things associated with his daughter's bodily existence which his ignoble pride and anger had called unclean, and had set them up as the idol of his ineffectual homage and repentance. And in order to enhance, as it were, the tragedy, he had brought forth from its obscurity the banished portrait, to shame still more, by its gracious and forgiving beauty, the neglect and defacement which his erring wrath had inflicted upon the garments the girl had worn.

Most forlorn of all, however, was the probability that the old man had forgotten Annette herself, and was grieving partly at the spiritual blight which his false judgment of her had brought upon himself, and partly at the loss of that grievance which had been the food and occupation of his latter years. His resentment had been selfish, and now his sorrow was no less so, nor did he himself know what he was actually doing, or wherefore he did it. He had but felt an impulse to give some expression to his inward commotion, and the impulse had taken this form. It was vague and inadequate; but in so far it indicated the rudderless and objectless state to which his life had been brought. The abstraction which prevented him from being aware

that there was a spectator of his proceedings, was another sign of the completeness of his bewilderment—for bewilderment, like excessive concentration, sometimes acts like a partial blindness. Murdoch Vivian, being unconnected in the Frenchman's mind with the events that had brought matters to their present pass, was for the moment as good as invisible to him. He might remember afterwards that some one had been there; but it would be like the memory of a dream.

As for Murdoch, his chief desire was of course to get out of the way, and the path was now open to him; yet he lingered a moment, overcome by the grim oddity of the spectacle. Mossy Jakes had got down on his knees in front of the chair, and was muttering to himself in an inarticulate undertone. Here was one who had apparently suffered shipwreck by the same means that had started Murdoch on what bade fair to be a prosperous voyage. But Murdoch's brain was so disconcerted by the fatal occurrence of which he only was as yet aware, as to admit an undefined impression that he was somehow involved in Mossy Jakes's incomprehensible mummery. The clergyman, in fact, had only mechanically apprehended the bearing upon his own fortunes of his brother's sudden death; it had so upset (or it may be more correct to say, forestalled) his expectations, that in his heart he was half disposed to regard it as a sort of trick, destined to bring him no good. There was a death-scent in the air, however hopefully reason might talk. The riches and power which seemed within his grasp were like those fairy treasures which, upon examination, prove to be pebbles and chaff. The true place for Murdoch was in the dust and mildew there beside the Frenchman. A weakness of heart and purpose visited the man, and made him tremble and sicken. Thoughts of all the evil he had done crowded upon him unbidden, demanding whether he deserved any better fate than failure and despair. Persons like this reverend gentleman usually contrive to justify to themselves even the least handsome of their acts; but at rare seasons this feat of imagination fails them, and a helpless depression takes its place. They feel, perhaps, that luck is their only god, and that it is a deity upon whose constancy no dependence can be placed; in the midst of its most indulgent smile it may be compassing their destruction. At such seasons there may be a panic-stricken impulse on their part to abandon this perilous religion, and prostrate themselves before a less whimsical Omnipotence; but the impulse commonly evaporates along with the panic. In Murdoch's case it was not sufficient to make him restore the stolen documents to the place where they belonged, and confess that of himself he could do nothing. Time enough to repent, if repentance were necessary, after the advantages now in prospect had been secured. It is more comfortable to thank the Lord for benefits already acquired than to leave it to His wisdom whether they shall be acquired or not. Possession should come before gratitude, lest it be omitted altogether. Reinforcing his fainting courage by these and the like considerations, the Reverend Murdoch Vivian stole away on tip-toe behind Mossy Jakes, and went forth where night and Madeleine awaited him.

CHAPTER XI.

'There is no sequestered grot, lone mountain tarn, or isle forgot,
But justice, journeying in the sphere, daily stoops to harbour there.'

AFTER the boy known as Jack had seen the black coat-tails of his clerical visitor disappear round the angle of the ravine, and after he had recovered from the emotional reaction following the adventure, he fell into serious meditation upon himself and his circumstances. He was now (in his opinion) come to an age when a man should make up his mind what he was to do in the world. He was five feet four inches in height; with his bow and arrow he had often killed a hare at eighty yards, and had once, at a distance of one hundred and fifty yards, transfixed a great blue heron, measuring six feet across the wings. He could run by the hour at a time, along the woodland paths, without getting out of breath or exhausted. He could swim out to Plover Rock, a mile from shore, and back again without touching bottom. He could find his way through the forest by day or night, and knew how to get food and comfort in places where an ordinary white man would have gone hungry and comfortless. He could speak and read both French and English, and could pick his way pretty readily through a local Indian dialect; and he could play a goodly number of interesting tunes on his banjo. These things of themselves were doubtless enough to enable a man to succeed in life; and Jack possessed in addition several incidental advantages. He had neither father nor mother, and so far as he knew had never had any; and as a direct consequence was unencumbered with relations in any degree. In changing his abode he would be relieved from the trouble of either selling his furniture or carrying it with him, for furniture he had none, unless his shooting and musical apparatus could be called by that name. Travel, even of the most extended description, was certain to cost him nothing, not only because the journey would be performed on foot, but because he had no money to disburse, should payments be required. It was true that he might desire to proceed by sea, but in that case his prospects were equally clear; he knew enough of the construction and managment of an ordinary coasting smack to have received overtures from the captains of more than one of them to try a voyage; and no doubt he might find a place on one of those big three-masted affairs that stood up against the horizon on clear afternoons, and rode at anchor at Newburyport, according to the tale of those who had been there. At present he rather inclined to try his fortunes on the blue water; it seemed a quicker way of arriving at the solution of delightful mysteries than was afforded by an overland journey. However, this momentous decision could lie over for a few minutes, or even until to-

morrow morning. In adopting measures calculated to influence one's whole future life it is well not to be over-hasty.

Now as to the causes which prompted Jack to undertake his indeterminate emigration, plenty of them were to be had for the asking. In the first place, he had a curiosity to see something that he had not yet seen; and he was under the impression, common to many older and possibly wiser persons than himself, that this something was not to be found by remaining where he now was. In the second place, he had a special disinclination to abide in his present quarters; and this not merely because the weather was fine and suited to adventure, either in the direction of the rising or the setting sun, but because the civilised community of Suncook had of late betrayed symptoms of a renewed desire to bring him within the pale of order and respectability. Such a contingency was manifestly not to be risked by a free and enlightened being; and since it might not be easy to resist for an indefinite period the attacks and plottings of a hostile population, the only dignified alternative was a timely retreat. This argument would perhaps have possessed less instant weight, however, had it not been for the unpleasant incident which had occurred that afternoon, and which had brought affairs to a climax. Jack felt that he could never again enjoy a moment's peace in a place where his peace had been so rudely and so wantonly disturbed. The spot would always henceforth be associated with the unlovely face and figure, and objectionable proceedings of the man in the black clothes. Moreover, he had a haunting presentiment that the man in question would come back, at the head of an army only less intolerable than himself, intent upon taking him prisoner, and perhaps destroying him. He had heard that in the Indian wars prisoners were tortured and burned at the stake; and that would most likely be his fate, if captured alive. As to his means of defence, he had only eleven serviceable arrows left; and allowing that he killed one or two assailants at every shot, there would still be a sufficient number remaining to make things unpleasantly warm for him. In the last resort, indeed, he had the control of another weapon of offence, far more terrible than arrows, or rifles either, for that matter; but everything depended upon the effectiveness with which this weapon was used on the first attempt, for the simple reason that it could never by any possibility be used more than once. It was capable, all by itself, of annihilating a small army, especially if the army advanced to the attack in close order; but if it should miss fire, it would act as an assistance to, rather than an exterminator of, the enemy. In addition to this drawback, Jack was harassed in the bottom of his soul by some secret doubts as to whether the thing could be made to work at all. It could not be denied that the means to be employed to bring it into action appeared wholly out of proportion with the magnitude of the promised effect. Some months ago Jack had made an excursion of a dozen miles or so inland, and in the course of his wanderings he had come across a stone quarry, and he became much interested in watching the process of getting out the

masses of granite. In several places he saw men at work drilling deep narrow holes in the rock; and into these holes he afterwards saw them pour some handfuls of black granular substance, resembling very course black sand. When all the holes had been filled, and the contents packed tightly into place, all the men left off working, and retired to a distance, or screened themselves behind corners or barriers, and in a few moments Jack was surprised to find himself apparently the sole occupant of the quarry. But while he was marvelling at this disappearance, and trying to fathom the meaning of the shouts which met his ears on every side, all at once a series of deafening explosions took place in every part of the quarry, accompanied by clouds of white smoke, and the upheaval and fall of huge lumps of rock. And while he was wondering whether the solid earth had become alive, and were going to depart from its present situation and remove to some other place, a fragment of granite about two feet in diameter rose in the air like a bird, and came down with a crash a yard or so from where he was standing.

The next minute all the quarrymen came out of their hiding-places, and some of them came round him and began asking him inconsiderate questions; such as whether his mother knew he were out? whether he wanted to run away with the quarry? whether he wished to comb his hair with a ton of granite? whether he were in the habit of chewing pebbles when he was at home? whether he thought that powder would sit still and wait until he was ready to move? what the tarnation Moses his business was there any way?—and the like. To all these interrogatories Jack opposed a grave and dignified silence, and by-and-by the men left him and betook themselves laughing to their work. But one big brown-bearded fellow, with strong sunburnt arms like the limbs of a yew-tree, patted him kindly on the shoulder, made him come with him to the place where he was at work, and there entertained him with merry and curious conversation all the afternoon. Jack soon got to like him very much, and they became mutually confidential. The man had a pleasant, mellow way of using his voice, which he brought out of the depths of his broad chest, and modulated at different parts of the sentences, instead of speaking all in one key, as other men did. He said his name was Hugh Berne, and that he was born in a town in England called Bideford, on the coast of Devonshire. When he was a boy he had shipped on board a vessel bound for China, and after arriving at a place called Hong-Kong, where he left the ship without asking leave, he wandered about, meeting with many adventures both by land and sea; and at length came to a country named Australia, which was about ten thousand miles distant from Bideford, and nearly or quite as far from Suncook. There he had lived for several years, raising cows and sheep and getting together a good deal of money. But at last a year came when for eleven months not a drop of rain fell, and the biggest river in Australia dwindled away to a series of half-stagnant puddles. All Hugh's cattle died, and he left Australia with ten pounds in his

pocket, and embarking in another vessel he set sail for New Zealand. There he added little to his fortune, but something to his experience, for he had many fights with a stalwart race of savages known as Maories, and got one of his ribs broken with a club, and the point of a spear driven through the muscle of his leg. However, the climate was very fine, and his mind was easy, so his wounds soon healed and made his body easy also. Then he set sail again, taking the place of second mate on board a ship bound for Lima in Peru. But hurricanes and other disasters overtook them; they were driven many hundred miles northward of their true course, and at length the vessel sprang a leak; and the end of it was that Hugh, and a young fellow of twenty named Bryan, were washed ashore on a raft one morning on Rey Island in the Bay of Panama. Thence, after being pretty well treated by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, they made their way across the Isthmus, and Bryan sailed for England; but Hugh thought he would have a look at the United States before he went home, so he worked his way up to New Orleans—a town inhabited chiefly by French folks and niggers, and lying beneath the level, as it seemed, of the biggest river in the whole earth, which swirled along, up above there, like a yellow ocean running a race—and so on by degrees to New York and Boston, and finally to Newburyport and Suncook. Here he had been for nine months or more, but he was becoming restless, and meant to shift his quarters ere long.

Here the narrator paused, and the auditor also shut his mouth in order to ask whither he purposed going next.

'Nay, that's more than I can tell thee, Jack, my lad,' replied the brawny Marco Polo, fetching a mighty blow with his hammer on the head of the huge iron spike which he held in his left hand. '"Tis small odds to me, so I come to new lands, which is ever my desire. Chuck a copper aloft, and cry heads or tails—that's my religion!'

'But if you had no copper?' suggested Jack.

'Why then,' said Hugh, laughing and rolling his shoulders about, 'I'd make shift to wait until religion came to me again.'

'Have you ever heard anything more about Bryan?' Jack inquired.

'Ah, he was a lively chap!' said Hugh, poising his hammer and turning his head on one side. 'Twenty year old, and as big a man as I be, or nigh to it, though a bit under my height. Always jolly, and feared neither God nor man; he saved a man from drowning once, with a thirty-foot shark within ten yards of 'em: and the next day, it might be, he smote a fellow under the ear and laid him stiff for giving him the lie at cards. And he was a gentleman's son, was Bryan, though as rough outside as any of us; come of a good stock, somewheres in the north, but which it was none knew, for Bryan was the only name he give us. No, nothing have I heard of him since last we parted in Porto Bello town, but he's in some mischief, I doubt, be he where he may.'

With that he wagged his brown beard and set to hammering again.

'Why are you making that hole?' demanded Jack.

'Now that's a thing thou shouldst know of thyself, friend Jack, having seen the working of it—and much to thy cost, only luck would have it other ways. This hole is to hold the powder; then we fire it through this bit of yarn, and what happens then?—thine eyes have seen it.'

'Do you call that black stuff powder?'

'Ay, no less.'

'How does it make such great rocks move?'

'Nay, there I am no wiser than thou. Only I know that so it is.'

Jack was silent for some time, but at length he said—

'Hugh Berne, will you give me some of that powder?'

'Ay, and welcome, if thou'lt promise not to blow thy head off with it,' replied the man of Devonshire. 'Here, open thy pouch. Now thou hast enough to blow up Suncook meeting-house; but do it not, my lad, lest the steeple fall down and make a hole in thee. But what art going to use it for?'

'I will tell you some other time,' said Jack mysteriously. 'I should like to go with you when you go away from here. I should like to see Bryan.'

'Give me thy hand, lad,' exclaimed the brown giant; 'I like thee, and thy way of speaking out. We'll have a cruise together yet, and find Bryan too, if above ground he be. Come here again, when time serves, and talk it over.'

To this proposal Jack agreed very readily, and so the friends parted. But from one cause and another it so happened that no good opportunity of revisiting the quarry came, wherefore Jack had not seen Hugh from that day to this. But he had kept the powder, and kept it dry, and had stowed it away in as nearly the right place and manner as Hugh's hints and the light of his own understanding had enabled him to do. All there was to be done after that was to await development, which, after all, is not a complex task, if one has a fair amount of patience and no temptation to premature action. Howbeit, after his first spell of meditation on the eventful afternoon of which I write, he made certain preparations—not that he had any definite anticipation of calamity, but he reasoned, convincingly enough, that if he were going to start on his travels the next day, any calamity which meant to take place must necessarily do so during the next twelve hours. So the afternoon waned, and the sun set, making the west look so attractive, that Jack, gazing thitherward, was pretty well resolved to take that direction at sunrise. He recollected, however, that the sunrise was often quite as alluring as the sunset, and if it should be so to-morrow he might possibly wish to change his mind. Thus he kept the question in abeyance.

When the transparent shadows of evening began to deepen in the ravine, Jack went into his cave and laid hold of his supper, reflecting as he did so that he should never sup in this place again. The thought did not sadden him, for homesickness was a thing he had as yet had

no opportunity to know anything about. In his visions of the future he saw such caves as this awaiting him at the end of every day's journey, and Suncook somehow only far enough off to ensure his safety. And Mossy Jakes—would Jack never wish to see him again? Well, he must first have an experience of what it was not to be able to see him. He had often not set eyes on him for a week or two weeks at a time, and felt none the worse for it. But Jack probably had no idea what a difference there is between choosing not to see a person and not being able to see him. Now it is easy for any of us to understand why we should feel one way when our friend goes to the Antipodes, and quite another way when he dies, though we know in either case that he will never appear before our mortal eyes again. What chiefly possessed Jack's mind at present was a sense of novelties to come; it was pleasurable, and took away a part of his appetite.

Now the moon rose, and sent soft shafts and pools of light into the ravine. The silence at this hour was great and sweet. Jack fetched his banjo, and sitting on the Witch's Head he plucked at the strings and let his thoughts sail away in vague melodies. Under the influence of the music he presently became melancholy, but it was a luxurious kind of melancholy, which he liked better than most so-called enjoyments. It lifted his face upwards, and made his eyes grow large and his heart beat full. It made him feel that there was some delicious thing in the world which was better worth having than any other thing, and which he would one day find. He played very softly, lest the vision should take alarm and vanish; and the sea murmured a tender accompaniment and filled the listening pauses. Meanwhile the moon climbed higher, until it rode among the leafy summits of the trees, and drew white curves upon the eddying blackness of the rivulet, and rested its light upon the stern brow of the Witch's Head, and cast Jack's shadow into the darkness on the other side. The boy struck a few concluding chords and then rested the banjo across his knees. The tinkle of the rivulet, which had seemed rhythmical just before, now confessed itself only music disorganised. A tiny chorus of tree-frogs higher up the ravine prattled cheerfully about their small affairs. Jack was beginning to feel drowsy.

But now a thing happened that set him wide awake again, and something more. He had been sitting quite motionless for several minutes; nevertheless he all at once became aware of a motion somewhere—a sort of deep tremor or vibration that shook him where he sat. The vibration grew more marked; and soon he perceived it was the Witch's Head itself that trembled. Without any agency of his own, so far as he could tell, the great boulder was shaking to its foundations, and with a movement unlike any that Jack had ever communicated to it. It shuddered as if in fear, or with a premonition of some great event to come. And with that Jack remembered—and the memory sent the blood hot to his cheeks and checked the evenness of his breath—those tales that the Indians had told him, how the enchanted stone was wont to tremble thus at the approach of danger and treachery.

After continuing for some two minutes, the motion ceased. Jack slipped down the back of the boulder, and entered his cave, whence he emerged a moment afterwards, having left his banjo inside. He had his flint and steel in his hands, and, crouching down in the shadow, he made some careful movements with his hands in the vicinity of the narrow crevice between the boulder and the base on which it rested. Having accomplished what he wished, the boy came out from the shadow, and bending his ear earthwards, listened intently. A minute or more passed away, and nothing came of it. Jack relaxed his attitude, and raised his head doubtfully. But the next instant he became tense again. Far down the ravine echoed the sound of footsteps—a heavy, clumsy tread that the boy recognised; and to confirm its identity, he presently heard a voice—a smooth, yet harsh voice, whose tones he could never forget. This voice was addressing some person or persons following behind—evidently the hostile army of the villagers. The worst that Jack had apprehended had therefore come to pass—his enemies, led on by his arch-enemy, had come by night to surprise and capture him. Capture him they might; but they should not surprise him; he would sell his liberty and life dearly. A stern expression settled upon the boy's face—an expression not unfamiliar to those who knew him in after years, but which seemed strange now, contrasted with his youth and innocence. As the steps and voice drew near, he retreated within the shadow of the rock, and was lost to sight.

'Yes, yes—we are all right now,' said the voice; 'I recognise the place. Do you wait here, while I climb up and take——'

A hissing flash leapt up between the boulder and the adjoining wall of the ravine, turning the moonlight a ghastly blue by its hot redness. Then came a vast roar and concussion, and a glare of smoky light, and a vision of a vast body upheaving and descending. It was a sight and a sound to paralyse the stoutest nerves for a time. Blackness followed, and a grinding noise, and the crash and thunder of an immeasurable heaviness falling, and stunning the solid earth with a shock like an earthquake. After that, distracted echoes, flying far and near, and dying reluctantly away; the slow drifting of a pall of dust and smoke; the scared chatter and twittering of a thousand awakened birds; last of all, a sluggish silence, and the quiet returning lustre of the untroubled moon. Nature took but that short time to resume her eternal, all-surviving composure. But the wondrous stone, which for unknown ages had hung in mysterious poise above the narrow stream—the Witch's Head—had vanished from its immemorial seat. Prone in the ravine it lay, wedged immovably between the rocky walls, and damming the astonished rivulet, which rose behind it in a level pool, and forced a brawling passage past either side, and so on once more, confusedly babbling, seaward. A few minutes later, and a stranger, passing that way, would never have suspected the overturn and cataclysm that had taken place.

CHAPTER XII.

Murdoch Vivian disappears for the present, but leaves something behind him of theatres and things theatrical: Jack hums an air.

JACK leaned within the doorway of the cave, in a state of partial stupor. The result of his experiment had surpassed his most sanguine expectations, and he was for some time under the impression that the whole explosion had occurred in his own head. The smoke blinded him; the breath had been shaken out of his lungs by the concussion, and the spasmodic gasps whereby he strove to recover it only had the result of filling his throat with dust and the vapour of burnt powder. It seemed to him that he would never feel comfortable again. He held his bow in his left hand, with an arrow fixed in the string; but anybody might have come and taken his weapons away from him, without his being able to offer any resistance, and probaby without his even knowing it. But no one came.

Gradually the boy's senses came back to him. He passed his hand over his head, and failed to detect any essential alteration in its contour or position. All his limbs seemed whole, and his body much as usual. His eyesight, however, was still in rather a defective condition; wherever he looked, he saw a spectral flash, and the ghost of the great noise surged again through his nerves. His feeling was that something terribly wicked and unnatural had broken loose, and had committed an intolerable outrage. But before long he recollected that the breaking-loose in question was not unconnected with a previous action of his own; and then all the circumstances of the affair recurred to him. He had been attacked—he had been in danger—was he not in danger still? Bracing up his faculties, and subduing as well as he could the tremors that yet quivered through him, he waited for some sound or sign to inform him of the enemy's whereabouts. He waited in vain; at last he ventured to peep forth a little; no threatening array of armed men was visible in the ravine; the coast seemed clear; but the great stone was gone from its place, and lay below there, choking up the narrow way with its unwieldy vastness. An odd sense of emptiness or vacancy haunted the place where it had been; Jack felt impelled to thrust his bow over the spot, to assure himself that the Witch's Head was indeed gone. Yes, gone it was: and so was the Suncook brigade. Not a man of them all was visible. Their hearts must have failed them, and they had taken to flight. Jack generously admitted the probability that in their place he would have done the same thing.

But just as he was beginning to breathe freely once more, and to feel like himself, he heard, quite close at hand, a plaintive, whimpering sound, like the crying of a child. He was on his guard at once. It was not likely that a child would be in the glen at that time of

night, especially under these peculiar conditions. Children were not generally enlisted in a band of desperate men, conspiring to drag their foe into captivity, and probably to burn and torture him. No—this was a treacherous device to lure him from his stronghold; but Jack was not to be snared in any such obvious way. He refitted his arrow to the string, and stood on the alert.

The crying continued, and certainly it sounded marvellously child-like. Jack listened critically. There were short sobbings, followed by half-uttered piteous words, and then an unrestrained outburst of long-drawn woe. As the lament went on the listener, in spite of himself, found his incredulity melting away, and something else was melting also, with the effect of bringing sympathetic tears to his eyes.

'It must be real,' argued Jack with himself, 'because—because—' He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand.

Being now unable any longer to hold out against this consummate beguilement of the enemy—if beguilement it were—Jack emerged wholly from the concealment in which he stood, and looked down the ravine towards the place whence the weeping proceeded. And lo! there stood a small figure, dressed in a short petticoat and embroidered jacket, with a straw hat on the back of its head, black hair tumbling about its face, and its chin uplifted in heart-broken abandonment of grief. There she stood, entirely alone and helpless; and no little girl, since the world began, ever looked more grievously alone and helpless than she did.

Jack spoke out at once.

'Don't you cry, little girl,' he said. 'There won't be any more noise. Did it frighten you?'

She stopped sobbing promptly, and gazed about, with tremulous lips apart.

'Wh—wh—ere are you?' she quavered out at length.

'Here!' said Jack, waving his arm to define his position. 'I'll come down to you. Are you sure nobody else is there?'

'Ye—ye—yes; I think so.'

'All right, then; you're safe; I'll take care of you,' said Jack, finding himself not only fearless, but possessed of a reserved fund of valour sufficient for two. He climbed down from his coign of vantage, and approached her. She drew back a little.

'Are you an ordinary boy?' she inquired.

'I don't know,' Jack replied, somewhat abashed, and scarcely prepared to say, on a moment's warning, what an ordinary boy was. 'I suppose I am,' he added.

'Let me look at you,' said the young lady. 'Stand still with your face to the moon.'

'Is this right?' asked Jack, endeavouring to fix his regards upon the orb of night, but impelled to glance aside to see whether his critic were satisfied with him.

Whether she were or not was a matter she kept to herself for the present. She eyed him in silence with a pair of deep black eyes, the

lashes of which yet glistened with tear-drops. Her small bosom also heaved now and then, as with a wave of the late disturbance. But mentally she had already recovered her composure. Jack, on the other hand, who had never been gazed at in this manner by one of the opposite sex before, did not feel nearly so much master of the situation as while he was consoling feminine distress from the mouth of the cavern.

'You had better tell me your name,' observed the black-eyed girl, not in a menacing tone, but as if suggesting something very much to Jack's advantage. Jack modestly and submissively accepted the hint, and mentioned the humble word which was responsible for his identity.

'But you have not told me your family name,' said his examiner, shaking her head slowly with an air of being constrained, against her more indulgent impulses, to express her dissatisfaction. 'Are you of gentle birth, little boy?'

The top of her head was on a level with Jack's chin as she uttered these words, but Jack felt that her description of him was perfectly justifiable. She was addressing him from an altitude to which he had never even aspired. He was so occupied in experiencing this conviction that he quite forgot she had expressed her superiority in the form of a question. He stood before her with downcast eyes, fumbling with his arrow.

'Don't you know,' she said, more affably, 'that nobody has only one name except kings and queens, and princes and princesses? You see there is no danger of their being mistaken for anybody else. And you are not a king, you know, or a prince. My name is Madeleine Vivian. Is not that a magnificent name? You see I don't mind not being a princess, for then I should be only Madeleine.'

Jack still remained silent, being persuaded that in the presence of so much erudition and dignity it became him not to speak. Perceiving the impression she had made, Madeleine increased her graciousness.

'I don't mind you at all,' she affirmed, tossing back her hair, and smiling upon him encouragingly. 'I think you are a very nice sort of boy. But I didn't like that fire and earthquake at all. You didn't make it, did you?'

'Not exactly,' said Jack, distressed at this turn of the conversation. After a moment's hesitation a helpless regard for the truth obliged him to add, 'But I don't suppose it would have happened if it hadn't been for me.'

'That was very wrong of you,' said Madeleine, after a pause. 'It is always wrong to do what I do not like. You won't do it again, will you?'

There was an accent of appeal in the last sentence that did something to set Jack at his ease, for it reminded him that this superior person had after all behaved very much like a little girl only a few minutes before, and might conceivably do so again. But he hastened

to disavow any intention of repeating the late performance, and observed that he would not have been guilty of it at all had he known that Madeleine was there. 'But I thought it was somebody else,' he added.

'Oh! do you mean an ugly man with black things on the sides of his face, and said he was Murdoch Vivian, and my father? I didn't believe him, though.'

'Where is he?' demanded Jack, quickly grasping his bow.

'I think he ran away. He was going in front when the earthquake fell down, and then I didn't see him. Something puffed me over, and the brook wet my dress. I'm glad he is gone; he said we were coming to get a doctor: but doctors don't live in this sort of places in England. Do you live here, Jack?'

'I've got a cave up there,' said Jack, in a deprecating tone.

'One that you can live in? A robber's cave?'

'No, it isn't a robber's cave,' returned Jack, sorry to disappoint her manifest interest; 'it's only mine. But you can live in it—I can, any way.'

'You may show it to me,' said Madeleine, with a condescension that barely veiled her curiosity. 'We can pretend it's a robber's cave, you know, and that you are the robber.'

'I shouldn't like to be a robber to you. Those robbers that Gil Blas tells about were unkind to women; and I'm sure I never could be unkind to you.'

'Oh, well, of course you needn't be that. You must be gallant and courteous. Oh, I'll tell you! we'll pretend that the ugly man—that he was carrying me away, you know, and that you fought him and slayed him, and rescued me. There were robber barons who used to do like that. Then you invited me to enter your cave, saying that it ill befits a lady of my condition, but you—you didn't have anything better, you know. We can make it up as we go on. Take my hand, and help me to get up.'

If inferior to his companion in the dramatic instinct, Jack was by no means wanting in imagination, and he fell in with Madeleine's idea very pleasantly. He was moreover much encouraged by the change in her manner; and he reasoned that if she could pretend to be the distressed maiden in the hands of outlaws, she had perhaps been also playing a part when she lately overwhelmed him with her dignity and attainments. It might be that her genuine self was more like the trembling and tearful little creature whom he had first seen standing forlorn in the moonlight, than any character that she had adopted since then. He took her hand accordingly, and led her up the little ascent to the portal of the cave with excellent deference and gentleness.

'This is a real cave, isn't it?' said the lady, hesitating on the threshold. 'It looks very dark. Are there any more robbers inside?'

'No, there are only you and I. And I've got a lamp that Deborah gave me.'

'Deborah? Is Deborah my rival?'

'She is the cook at Mossy Jakes's,' said Jack, uncertain whether or not the one implied the other. 'She has a black face, but the insides of her hands are almost white.'

'Oh, then she is not like me; she is not beautiful. Will she cook our supper for us?'

'She isn't here; but if you are hungry I will get you some supper.'

By this time Jack had conducted his fair guest into the cave, and was lighting the lamp.

'Well, perhaps you'd better,' said Madeleine, seating herself on the mattress of sweet fern, and clasping her hands round her knees. 'Of course the robber baron would offer refreshments to the lady. Besides,' she added, with a perception of the occasional coincidence of the real with the ideal, 'I am myself very hungry.'

If Jack had been older and more experienced he might have paused to congratulate his companion on the faculty of intellectual detachment which her use of the word 'myself' showed. Being only a boy, however, untrained in histrionic appreciation, but fully alive to the unpleasantness of hunger, he straightway went to work to get some food ready; and soon an appetising odour dispersed itself through the cavern, causing even Madeleine to relinquish for a while her assumed personality, and to watch with unaffected interest the homely drama of the kitchen. The fire was kindled in the stone fireplace, the pot was suspended over it, and an agreeable bubbling established itself in the interior. Jack knelt in front with an original wooden spoon of his own manufacture in his hand, now stirring the decoction, and now turning to smile promisingly upon his guest. The grey walls of the cavern sparkled as the blaze leaped up, and altogether the aspect of things was extremely cosy. Meanwhile the silent moon was lighting up the ravine outside, and dropping quivering rays into the depths of the dark pool that had formed against the overturned boulder.

'We don't need the lamp now that the fire is going,' remarked Madeleine; 'and I think it would look prettier and more mysterious without it. Shall I blow it out?'

Jack said that she might; and he added, with innate hospitality, that she was at liberty to do anything she pleased so long as she honoured his abode with her presence—or words to that effect. In fact, the children were losing no time in making friends with each other.

'Do you live this way always?' the maiden inquired. She had drawn nearer the fire, and was squatting in front of it, and poking it occasionally with the point of one of Jack's arrows, which he was too polite to restrain her from doing.

'Yes,' he answered, 'ever since I went away from Mossy Jakes's.'

'It must be very nice. I think I will stay and live here with you. You can go out in the evenings, you know, and bring in booty; and then we will tell each other the histories of our lives and adventures; or we could get married. I might be your bride.'

'Perhaps it would be better not to get married,' suggested Jack, who, it will be remembered, had not had the advantage of observing the matrimonial relation from a favourable point of view. 'We might do the other part, you know, without that.'

Madeleine took the amendment in very good part; but she observed that the possession of her would probably be disputed at the sword's point by the host of her warlike relatives and friends.

'There will be bloody combats,' she said, shaking back her hair with a heroic look. 'My Uncle Floyd will come; and perhaps a whole fleet of ships of war will set sail from England. I shall stand by and see you fight, and when you conquer them—— How nice that looks? Don't you think it's almost done now? I am so hungry!'

'If you will hold the dish, I'll put some into it. Will the ugly man come to fight, too?'

'I suppose so, unless you really slayed him just now.'

'You said he ran away,' said Jack anxiously.

'I'm sure he must have wanted to, but perhaps he couldn't.'

'Well, I hope he did,' said Jack, becoming serious. 'I shouldn't like him to be dead—quite, you know; and besides, then he would be under the great stone.'

'It tastes very good, only it needs some salt,' Madeleine declared.

'There is some in that little hole in the rock beside you. Perhaps I had better go outside and look——'

'Oh, no! I'd rather you wouldn't leave me here. And it makes no difference about him. Nobody wants him; and if he's under the stone, I'm sure you can't get him out, nor any one else. It would be no use either, because he would be dead.'

'I shouldn't mind his being dead so much,' said Jack, pondering the matter, 'if I could only know that I hadn't made him so myself.'

'It makes no difference about him,' Madeleine repeated. 'He wasn't a kind man, though he pretended to be at first. When we began to come here, he pulled me along faster than I wanted to go; and when I tried to stop, he scolded me. My Uncle Floyd never used to behave like that. I don't want you ever to kill him. You must take him prisoner.'

'Is he in England?'

'No, he is quite near here; we were walking home, and he sat down in the lane, and said nothing when I spoke to him. First he asked me to give him my hand, and I wouldn't, because I had the squirrel. I'm sorry I didn't now, because the ugly man said he was very ill. I like Uncle Floyd. I am the heiress of all his estates, you know. I shall be as rich as a princess.'

'How big is your house in England?'

'Oh, we have three houses; and they are so big that one room of

them is as big as all a house here. One of them is in London, in a fashionable square. Then there is one far away near Scotland, where they go when they want to shoot. The third one is the biggest of them all; that is in Devonshire.'

'Is it near a place called Bideford?' demanded Jack with interest.

'Why, how did you know? Have you ever been in England?'

'I know a man who lived in Bideford,' replied Jack, willing to make the most out of the fact; and it really seemed remarkable that there should be even so much of a link between him and his dark-eyed little guest. He went on to describe Hugh Berne, and to give a romantic sketch of his biography. 'He talks like this,' he added, giving a very fair imitation of Hugh's manner of intoning his speech.

'Yes, that is the way the people talk there,' said Madeleine, nodding her head approvingly. She had by this time finished her supper, and returned to the fern couch. 'Perhaps some time we'll let Hugh Berne come here and help us to fight against my relations,' she went on; for she was in the habit of inspecting all the bearings of a hypothetical situation, until it had acquired absolute consistency in her mind. 'One of you could fight when the other was resting.'

'How soon do you think your relations will get here?' asked Jack, suddenly remembering that an unlimited delay on this score might interfere with his own intention of departing by daybreak the next morning. The reflection caused him real uneasiness; for although he was not much behind Madeleine in the power of conceiving a set of circumstances, and himself as playing a part in them, he could not at the same time stand aloof, as she could, criticising her own invention, modifying it to suit her mood, and recognising all the while its essential unreality. By to-morrow morning Madeleine would have lived out her character of the abducted heiress, and be ready to adopt some other *rôle*.

'They may not come at all,' she said. 'I don't think they care for me any more than I do for them. You see, if I should be lost, they would get my estates; so perhaps I had better go back after all. But you may come too,' she continued graciously, seeing in imagination the despair of the poor robber baron at being deserted. 'I will give you the house in Devonshire, and you can come and see me in London. I have two aunts; they are rather troublesome old women. One of them is married, and has a lot of children, but they are very different from me. I like you better. My other aunt almost always lives with Uncle Floyd and me; she has no husband, because she is so ugly. She wants to teach me lessons, and says I ought not to read the old dramatists in the library. But I always do as I please; and when she troubles me, I say the speeches that are in the plays, and that always makes her angry. Sometimes I drive out with her in the Row: we go there in the afternoon in summer, when all the people come out in their finest clothes. But in the mornings Uncle Floyd and I have our ride; we gallop and gallop, and the gentlemen on horseback that we meet

salute us with their whips, because Uncle Floyd is a great baron and lord to everybody but me. But the best is when, sometimes, he takes me with him to the theatre. Have you any theatre here?'

'I don't think we have,' said Jack; 'what is it?'

'Oh, it's where everything is the way it ought to be, and the people do things that make you laugh and cry; and they seem to live all their lives, and yet it is over in two or three hours. They fall in love, and kill each other, and make plots . . . . You see what both sides are doing, instead of seeing only one side, as with real people; and so you get excited, and you wonder how it will end. And everything they say means something, instead of being only "How do you do?" and "It's a fine day," as real people do; and they tell you all they feel, and all they mean to do, just as you think things when you are alone. And when they are in love, it makes you feel as if you were in love too; and you feel as if you were laying their plots with them, or escaping from them: and you get dreadfully anxious for fear it shouldn't turn out the best way; but it always does, even when it's a tragedy. I like the tragedies the best.'

'What are tragedies?' Jack inquired, too much interested to feel ashamed of his ignorance. Madeleine, too, had kindled with her subject, and by her gestures and the play of her childish but expressive countenance, she rendered her description vivid and picturesque; and Jack's undisguised attention flattered and stimulated her.

'Tragedies are where they die at the end,' she said: 'and all sorts of awful things happen—murders; and lovers are parted; and people make dreadful mistakes: and when the truth comes to be known, it is too late. And oh, you feel so sorry—so sorry! but not a disagreeable kind of sorry, as you do at anything that is not nice really—but a noble sort of sorry—ever so much better than only laughing and not minding things. Then, when it's over, a great green curtain comes down, and you go out, and there are people going up and down the streets just as if nothing had happened, and it is so common and stupid you can hardly bear it. It makes you wish there were no real people alive.'

'But what sort of people are they that do the things in the theatre?' asked Jack, who had never conceived the idea of a race of beings of a species superior to mankind.

'Oh, what a pity that you don't know anything!' exclaimed Madeleine, with genuine commiseration. 'Why, actors and actresses, you know.'

'Are they alive the same way that we are?'

'Oh, in a great deal better way! Of course they must be; else common people wouldn't go to the theatre to see them. They are not like any people you ever saw; and yet they seem more like real people than if they were real . . . . I don't know how to tell you. But if all the strange and exciting things that ever happened to you in all your life were to get put together in one evening, then you would be something like an actor. But even then it wouldn't be happening

in a splendid great room with thousands of people looking on, and clapping their hands, and shouting, and lights, and gilding, and colours,—and splendid dresses!' Madeleine ended with a quick-drawn, panting sigh, her eyes brilliant in the fire-light, her black hair dishevelled round her flushed cheeks, and her hands trembling. Jack, with his wide and steady gaze meeting hers, and his lips set close, saw, or believed he saw, the air-drawn picture of all the wondrous scenes that were in her memory. It was a moment which they both remembered for many years.

There was a pause of some duration: the fire crackled, the thin smoke curled up the chimney, and the shadows of the two children rose and fell fantastically on the rough walls. 'I will go to London and see the actors and the theatre,' Jack said at last.

'Yes, come back with Uncle Floyd and me, and we'll all go together!'

'No, I'm going alone; and first I'm going round the world, as Hugh Berne did. You shall go one way, and I'll go the other, and we'll meet on the other side. And then I'll tell you what I've seen and what I've done.'

'Yes, after all that will be best,' exclaimed Madeleine, perceiving at once the romantic advantages of Jack's plan. She struck her little palms together, and held them clasped on her breast. 'I shall be sitting in my chamber, and suddenly the door will open and you will appear! And you will look all changed, with a great beard, perhaps, and a hat with a plume in it; and a scar across your forehead of some fight you had. And you will say, "Knowest thou me, O Madeleine?" and I shall say, "Right well I know thee, my lord Jack." No, you must have some other name than Jack; it doesn't sound right in that place. You should be Romeo or Othello—but you are not dark enough for Othello.'

'I don't care about the names,' said Jack; 'it's a little thing to care about, compared with some things.'

Here his eye happened to fall upon his banjo, which stood in the corner where he had hurriedly thrust it the moment previous to exploding his mine. He took it up, and let his fingers trip across the strings.

Madeleine moved her head with pleasurable surprise.

'Music!' she exclaimed. 'What a curious guitar! Do you know how to play?'

Jack made no other reply than to smite the strings again; and after a few preludes, he treated his guest to a plantation melody which he had learned from Deborah, and which bore the now time-honoured title of 'The Old Folks at Home.' But it was all new to Madeleine, and she followed it with delighted attention, and with a rapidly-growing perception that her robber baron did know something, in spite of his ignorance in matters theatrical; for a musician was a being second only to an actor in her regard. Jack's voice at this period was probably far from being the superb organ that it afterwards

became; but, such as it was, he used it with the intuitive accuracy and taste of one born with music in his soul. The banjo is an instrument well adapted to accompany the noblest voice, but it likewise has the quality of enabling a voice which has only time and feeling to recommend it to appear at its best. So Jack sang on through the whole list of old Deborah's melodies, Madeleine still pressing for more; and at last he said—

'Now I will sing you one other, and this one you must remember.'

'I shall remember all of them. But why do you say only this?'

'Because nobody told me this; I found it myself. And Mossy Jakes was very angry when he heard it. But I love it the best of all. It has no words; but you must understand what it means without words. This is the way it goes.'

Hereupon he sang the strange little air that has been before alluded to in these pages, and which had a mystery attached to it. For it was an air which Jack's mother had used to sing before he was born, and which she had sung even before she met Jack's father, in the girlish days when she and Professor Jacques Malgrè never dreamed that anything would ever part them. And afterwards, when she sat solitary and sad in the little chamber window of the old red house beneath the elm, gazing out over the cold sea, and knitting with listless fingers the tiny socks of the child that was to come—at that season the sweet and plaintive air had come back to her, and she had sung it to herself many and many times, thinking of France and of her father, and of all that had happened, and might be to come. It was the last song she sang before she began that pain that ended with her life. But by one of those mysterious processes, the laws of which are withheld from us, but of the truth whereof there exist instances innumerable, the memory of the mother's dying song lived on in her child, and years afterwards found utterance through his lips, though he never knew how he came by it. Such unconscious ingratitude is, indeed, one of the inevitable elements in the relation of child to parent. The one takes, as the other gives, without knowledge or acknowledgment.

'Do you like that?' asked Jack, when he had finished.

Madeleine had tears in her eyes. She nodded her head.

'Well,' said Jack, 'when I come to England I will sing that air; and then you will know, without any name, that I am myself.'

'Yes,' answered Madeleine, 'I shall know.'

The fire died out slowly, and as Jack continued to touch his banjo with meditative fingers, and with longer intervals between, Madeleine's eyelids began to droop, as well they might, for the night was late. When Jack saw how tired she was, he made up a pillow for her, and arranged her comfortably on the sweet-fern mattress, and covered her little feet with a strip of blanket. She stretched out her arms, and put up her lips to be kissed—a ceremony which her host performed with great discretion, considering how unaccustomed he must have been to such things. A minute afterwards Madeleine was asleep.

But Jack, impelled by a shrinking curiosity, stepped softly out of the cave, and stood on the spot where the Witch's Head had been. Truly, there was a great change; it made the boy feel already homeless. In the interval that had passed while he and Madeleine were in the cave, he had almost persuaded himself that all that wild episode had been a dream. But now he felt that it was no dream. There lay the boulder at his feet, with the brook swirling round it, and the dark pool that had not been there before. The boy gazed downward, striving to penetrate the secret that perhaps lay hidden beneath. But the pool and the stone were alike inscrutable; and the latter seemed to have become a part of the solid earth—as permanent and as immovable. Who should lift it? There it might remain for ever; and in Jack's heart would remain the knowledge that his act had placed it there.

When at last he re-entered the cave, the moon had passed the zenith and was declining towards the west. It had shone upon more than one strange spectacle that night. Jack felt his way cautiously to the couch, where the soft rise and fall of Madeleine's breathing told how fast she slept. He lay down gently, so as not to disturb her; but soon he had followed her wherever dreams lead. When the earliest glimmer of dawn found its way through the chinks of the rock, it revealed the two cousins, who knew not of each other's existence, resting with their arms round each other, and their faces, which time and suffering should so greatly alter, smooth and untroubled. It seemed almost a pity that they must wake.

CHAPTER XIII.

In which Jack has his ideal revealed to him: and learns what a keepsake is: and he and Madeleine say good-morning and good-bye.

JACK was the first to unclose his eyes, and raising himself on one elbow, he contemplated his still slumbering companion with grave intentness, except when a yawn constrained him to suspend his scrutiny for a few moments. Madeleine was by no means an unattractive object as she lay there, so frankly and heartily asleep, with her eyelashes lying like a border of black fringe upon her clear olive cheek, and her hair spread abroad as the thready plumes of sea-weed lie upon the sands after the tide has ebbed. As the sleep cleared from his eyes, Jack noticed that she wore a delicately wrought gold chain about her neck, to which a broad gold locket was suspended. The lid of this locket had got unfastened, revealing a finely painted miniature within—a specimen of art such as the forest-bred lad had never happened to see before. It was a female countenance, of striking and impressive beauty. It was dark and vivid in expression, the form a long oval; the eyes were large, and alive with brilliance and power. There was a saddened droop about the corners of the mouth, which

was exquisitely shaped, the lower lip much fuller than the one which rested on it. The hair, softly but intensely black, was massed above the forehead, and hung down beside the cheeks in heavy undulations. The neck was long, white, and firmly rounded, and supported the head like a flower. There was a certain severity about the level line of the brows, which increased the penetrating expression of the eyes beneath it. It was such a face as Jack's experience had not heretofore permitted him to conceive of; and he thought he should not care if there were no other face in the world.

After a while he rose from his place, and busied himself with preparations for breakfast, making as little noise as possible, in order not to shorten Madeleine's slumbers; but whatever he did the face attended him, and ever and anon he went back to the locket to get another peep at it. It seemed to him that this face could make him do wonderful deeds; it satisfied something in his idea of things which had till now lacked sustenance, and put the rest of the world in proper order and proportion. It seemed to say to him, 'I know you, and you know me; and it has always been so, only that hitherto you have forgotten.' It said also, 'I am waiting for you somewhere; search over the world, and you shall find me.' And the thought never now for an instant suggested itself to Jack that the face belonged to the past and not to the future. The accident of time had no relation with it; as it was, so it would always be. In other words, it owned all the qualities of immortality; there could be no disappointment or failure in it; it was infinitely worth caring for and finding.

Let the above remain written where it is, though much of it did not come consciously to Jack's apprehension until long afterwards. Nothing that is comprehended at the moment is especially worth comprehending; but true light dawns gradually, like the day. What Jack was sure of for the present was, that he had got hold of something poignantly real, and this conviction gave him security and confidence. Meanwhile, breakfast came into existence swiftly and prosperously, and the aroma of it crept like a flattering incense into Madeleine's nose, and finally waked her up. Singular to say, she knew where she was; her first glance was of pleasure, not of bewilderment. Perhaps her dreams and her waking were more nearly allied than is the case with most people.

'Good-morning, Jack! What a good breakfast that must be. I think I like the cave even better at breakfast than at supper. I wish we could take this cave to London.'

'I wish you had come to it sooner. After breakfast I'm going away.'

'Where are you going?'

'Oh, round the world,' said Jack, as if the journey was one which he was in the habit of making most forenoons in the week.

'It would not be polite to go away and leave me here, after inviting me, you know,' Madeleine said, in the manner of those who

believe the unconventional and the impossible to amount to the same thing. But Jack, for several reasons, was less unquestioningly submissive than yesterday, though he was at least as well disposed towards the object of his hospitalities.

'I'm not going to leave you here,' he explained, handing over a dish full of breakfast to her by way of recommending his speech. 'First, I shall take you to where the path to the village begins, so that you can get to your uncle.'

'Well, I shall tell him how nice it was here,' she said, affably.

'I think you'd better not tell him anything yet, else they might come after me before I could get away. They shouldn't know that you have seen me.'

'Oh, yes—a secret! Yes, Jack, I promise you they shall never know. They will wonder and wonder, but I shall be as silent as the grave!' said Madeleine, bringing a look of mystery into her eyes, and speaking in a most impressive tone. Then she changed to a more commonplace strain. 'Come and eat your breakfast here beside me. It will be years, and years, and ye—ars before we have our breakfast together again. Oh, and we must not forget to give each other keepsakes before—ere we part. What shall they be?'

'I don't know what a keepsake is,' said Jack, without faltering.

'Why, you might tell that from the word itself,' she returned, with a reproachful glance; 'it's something a person gives you to keep when you are going to forsake them—don't you see? And it makes you remember her, and think about her; and then at last, when you meet her, and you are both so much grown up and altered, that if it wasn't for the keepsakes you wouldn't recognise each other. But when you see them, then you know it must be she; and you take her to your heart. . . . That's what a keepsake means.'

Jack understood the definition without difficulty, in spite of the derangement of pronouns, which, perhaps, was the result of a defect in the English language quite as much as in Madeleine's grammar.

'You see there is not much here,' he said, glancing down at the little pile of objects which he had heaped up at one side of the cave, in order to have them handy against his departure. 'But whatever there is, is yours, if you want it.'

'Then I'll take the head of this arrow,' she said, with a promptness which seemed to indicate that she had already had her eyes upon it.

Jack, who would have surrendered even his iron kettle had she expressed a wish for that indispensable article, immediately cut the arrow-head from the shaft, and handed it to her with a cordial grace that would have done credit to Lovelace parting from Lucasta. The head was really a fine example of Indian art. It was shaped out of a flawless piece of semi-transparent jasper; and its long slender point and keen edges were as elaborately wrought and polished as if the work had been done by a scientific lapidary. The stem had been pierced by a small hole, to facilitate its being bound to the shaft; or,

as Madeleine observed, to pass the chain through by which she would suspend it round her neck.

'I will always wear it there, Jack,' she added; 'and when we meet after you have been round the world, you will see it there. Well, but now you must choose what I shall give you.'

Hereupon Jack could not for the life of him help looking in rather a guilty manner at the locket. If he could carry that talisman with him on his travels, his success in life would be assured beyond peradventure.

Madeleine followed his glance, and interpreted it immediately.

'Do you care for this old thing?' she exclaimed, unclasping it from the chain and holding it towards him. 'If I were at home I'd give you one all set with diamonds.'

'Perhaps I ought not to take it,' murmured Jack, as it lay in his open palm.

'Why not?'

'Because I want it so much,' said he, being unable to believe that his possession of anything so transcendently valuable could fail to inflict a proportionate deprivation upon the giver of it.

'Why, it's worth hardly anything; it's only plain gold,' cried Madeleine, as if gold were a chief ingredient of most things in this world.

'But the picture——' began Jack.

'Oh, yes, there's a picture in it. It's a portrait of my mother, I believe, or my grandmother. Do you want to have it taken out?'

'No,' said Jack; and if his voice was low, it was the intensity of the negative in his soul left little power of audible utterance.

'We both have our keepsakes, then,' said Madeleine, passing her chain through the hole in the arrow-head, and stowing it away beneath the front of her little dress. She looked pleased and complacent; but Jack's cheeks were deeply flushed, and his manner distraught.

Nothing more remained to be done except for Jack to gather his belongings together, and, after conducting Madeleine to the point whence the village could be seen, to say farewell to her. As they issued from the narrow door which neither of them were ever again to enter, the tender morning sunshine kissed their faces, and the dew from the vine that clustered overhead showered upon them in diamond drops. Everything that met their senses was full of freshness and the joy of living; for though the earth is extremely old, as we count time, not the newest of us all can look so young as she does on a clear morning of a New England June. The only feature of the scene that seemed not quite in keeping was a blackened space immediately at their feet, where the Witch's Head had formerly rested. The rock here was crushed and splintered by the rending of the powder charge; and a corresponding mark appeared upon the upturned surface of the boulder; the whole of which, moreover, had the pallid crudity of tint due to its having been sheltered from the mellowing

influences of storm and sunshine. Some of the bushes which grew low down on the sides of the ravine had been broken or uprooted by the fall—signs of violence abhorrent to the sweet harmony of nature's works. But the strength of the sun and the air, united with the dancing elasticity of youthful pulses and spirits, were more than enough to counterbalance these sinister suggestions, even when re-enforced by the darker possibility to which they pointed. Madeleine regarded the spectacle with a curiosity that had nothing gloomy in it; and her companion found himself indisposed to take any other than an optimistic view of the situation. Yet he was not unwilling to turn from it, and think of other things, as became a young hero who has the world to conquer. The work before him was not so easy that he could afford to handicap himself with such a dead-weight as that of the Witch's Head.

The children lost no time, therefore, in clambering down the ascent, and proceeding along the footpath beside the stream. Madeleine chatted as she went along with a gaiety and unrestraint that were scarcely usual with her, accustomed as she was to associate with people much older than herself, and to maintain her own dignity and importance with them. Jack made her forget her dignity; and his range of life and experience had been so utterly different from hers, that they could meet on the basis of unlimited mutual giving, and without friction or opposition. As for Jack, he said very little; being one of those in whom the presence of many thoughts produces silence, owing to the difficulty they find in forcing their way out through the limited outlets of speech.

'Oh, do you hear that?' exclaimed Madeleine at last, pausing in her walk and lifting her finger. 'Isn't it a bell?'

'It sounds like the meeting-house bell,' Jack replied, after listening for a moment. 'But to-day isn't Sunday; and they don't ring that way when any one is going to be buried. That would be much slower.'

'Perhaps some one is going to be married?' she suggested.

'Oh, no one would want to be married to any one here,' he replied, with unconscious cynicism. 'They do that only when they can't help it.'

At this point in the conversation a distant shout was heard; and after a short interval another, and still another. Then followed the rolling report of a gun, which Jack recognised as the voice of the old six-pounder which had been captured from the British in the war of 1812, and mounted on a sea-fronting eminence to the north of the harbour. But it had never before been fired except on Independence Day, or some similar celebration; and the ceremony was accomplished with a solemnity of parade and speech-making, and a display of uniforms and goose-step, such as could come only by prolonged forethought and preparation. What, then, was the explanation of it now?

'If we climb up the bank here we can see all over to the village

from behind those bushes, without their seeing us,' said Jack. 'Shall I go up alone, or can you come with me?'

'Oh, you must let me come too!'

'Take hold of my belt, then, and come along.'

In a few minutes they stood on the top of the little acclivity, which was here somewhat loftier than at the ordinary point of crossing further seaward, and commanded all the better a view of the village and its environs below. At the first glance it was evident that something out of the common was going forward. The bell was swinging and clanging diligently in the steeple, half-a-dozen men were busy reloading the six-pounder, all the population of the village seemed to have turned out, and in all directions small squads of four or five were moving inland or along the shore, now and then sending forth the shouts which the children had heard. One party was coming directly towards them, and were not above two or three hundred yards off.

'I never saw them doing like this before,' remarked Jack, uneasily. 'They seem to be looking for something. I hope——'

Here Madeleine, who had been gazing very earnestly at the group of persons who were nearest them, suddenly clapped her hands together and gave a little laugh.

'I know what it's all about,' she cried; 'how stupid not to have known before. Do you see that man and woman down there—the woman has on the tall black bonnet? Those are our servants that we brought over here with us—Philip and Jane, you know. And they have come out to look after me, because I am the great heiress, and they think I am lost!'

'Oh!' said Jack, with a sigh that indicated relief. The fact was he had begun to fear that Suncook was rousing itself to look for him. But, luckily, he was not an heiress! 'Well,' he went on, turning to his companion, 'you can let them find you now, and I must go.'

'I don't want to have you go, Jack!' said she, quaveringly. She put out her small hand, and took hold of the fringed seam of his deer-skin doublet. 'I like you,' she said, with vehemence; and her strange childish face looked up at him beseechingly.

But after a moment she loosed her hold of him, and waved him away. 'No, you must go,' she said; 'you must go round the world and become famous; and I will go to my estates and keep them for you. That is the way all knights and ladies must do. Farewell! You may kiss my hand.'

The boy gravely kissed her little twitching fingers; and then, with a tragic parting glance at him, she ran from him down the slope; and he turned back into the ravine.

CHAPTER XIV.

One of the best houses in London: and of a consultation that took place there between two aunts, a major, and a solicitor.

BETWEEN Oxford Street and Piccadilly, and a little to the west of New Bond Street, in London, there is a large square, where dull brick houses look forth upon an oblong enclosure of dingy greenery. The trunks and branches of the trees are black, and their leaves, when they wear them, look as if they needed washing; but they never are washed, to the day of their death. The inclosure is surrounded by a tall iron railing; within are straight paths and mathematical grass-plots; and in the grass-plots are flower-beds, chiefly inhabited by plants of a bushy nature—laurels and the like. The place is kept in rigid order; and on fine days a nurse or two may be seen promenading there with children. The latter are the offspring of the families who live in the square, and who thereby become entitled to the key of the iron gate by which access is obtained to this delectable rural retreat.

This square, forty years ago, was one of the centres of fashionable London society. It was not ordinarily a lively place, lying, as it did, aside from the main thoroughfares, and the passage of commercial traffic being tacitly discouraged. The breadth of its side-walks was, in fact, inversely proportional to the number of the persons who walked upon them. Peace was preserved by an extremely vertical policeman, who spent his official existence in throwing out his chest, straightening his knees, and observing that nobody did nothing improper. In the mornings, tradesmen's waggons rattled up to the various doors, their drivers precipitated themselves upon the area bells, bearing in their baskets the fuel of the aristocratic residents' dignified existence. About ten o'clock or even earlier, during the season, horses, saddled and bridled, are brought to some of the doors, and ladies and gentlemen in riding costume issue forth and mount them, and ride away to the Row. In the hours devoted to making calls, numbers of fine carriages, with thick wheels, lustrous horses, and powdered drivers and footmen, trundle up and empty their fashionable contents into the august portals. This is the bustling period of the day. In the evening other carriages appear, generally drawn by somewhat less immaculate steeds, and carry the people off to dinners, theatres, or evening receptions; or bring others to entertainments given in the square. In the latter case, the doorway of the entertaining mansion wears a deep hood of striped canvas, and a strip of carpeting is rolled down the steps and across the sidewalk, to receive the well-shod foot-prints of the upper ten thousand. Finally, at midnight, the rumble of returning vehicles begins to be heard, and lusty shouts of 'Lady Mayfair's carriage stops the way!'

This, at all events, is the way it used to be forty years ago. Of

late, the best people have taken up their march westward, in obedience to that mysterious impulse which appears to animate fashionable persons almost all over the world. This tendency, by the way, has never been satisfactorily explained. Can it be owing to the fact that the earth turns over towards the east, and that the higher ranks of society, in order to remain at the top, keep climbing up in the opposite direction? Be that as it may, the square in question is hardly so exclusive now as it used to be; and here and there, perhaps, a well-scoured brass plate displays itself on a broad front door.

One afternoon, in the early part of September of the year of which I am writing, a hackney carriage drove up to the door of one of the largest of the square mansions, and a gentleman in black frock-coat, and grey trousers strapped down under his boots, got out of it. 'You can wait,' he said to the driver. Then he ascended the steps and boldly pulled the bell-handle marked 'Visitors.' While waiting for the summons to be answered, he glanced gravely down at his respectable person, stamped his right boot slightly, pulled up his stock, and finally took a glance at his watch, which marked just one minute past three. He was a medium-sized, full-bodied man of some fifty years of age, with a keen, plump, smooth-shaven face, and a trick of suddenly thrusting out his under lip, and scratching underneath it with his forefinger; wrinkling his forehead at the same time in a sceptical manner. His smile was ready, and well under his control; and he wore a single eye-glass, which was of less use to him from an optical point of view, than as a weapon of offence and defence in his profession—which was that of a solicitor.

Presently the door swung open, and a footman in mourning livery showed himself.

'Is the Honourable Miss Vivian within?' inquired the solicitor, with a distinct and well-poised utterance.

The footman made way for him to enter. 'Kindly inform her,' the latter added, 'that Mr. Caliper has called, according to her appointment.'

'They're ready waitin' in the back drawing-room, Mr. Caliper,' said the footman. 'If you'll come this way, sir, I'll show you.'

And they went upstairs.

The back drawing-room was a large and lofty room with two windows (it was a corner house), one at the side, looking on the street, the other at the end, looking on the backs of some other houses—only that a small conservatory had been built out from it, so there were flowers to look at instead of bricks. This was before the day of artistic furnishing, and there was little to be found here in the way of decoration that would have been gratifying to a modern æsthetic taste. The walls were panelled and hard finished; the floor was carpeted to the footboard; the ceiling was ornamented with heavy mouldings of whitewashed plaster; the chandelier was an elaborate engine of gilt, bronze, and glass. The furniture was of solid mahogany, the chairs and sofas having curved and arabesqued backs, legs,

and arms. There were two or three large family portraits, of some value as regarded their authorship, but not otherwise attractive. In short, it was a room depressing to describe and to live in, which could have been endurable only to the hardy nerves of a generation less highly organised than our own. And yet Lord Castlemere had been accounted a man of exceptional refinement and taste.

The room, when Mr. Caliper was ushered into it, already had in it three personages—two ladies and a gentleman. The latter was standing with his hands behind his back, gazing into the conservatory window; he turned round when the lawyer was announced. He was a high-featured, fine-looking man, with white hair, moustache, and side-whiskers, dark grey eyebrows, and a very red complexion. His bearing was erect and brisk, and the cut of his well-fitting garments helped to indicate his profession; he was Major Clanroy, of the Guards. His wife, a stout, smiling, elderly lady, was seated with some work in her hands at one side of a table, on the other side of which sat an older lady, of leaner and more solemn constitution, with a small King Charles spaniel in her lap. These were the late Lord Castlemere's two sisters.

The solicitor bowed low; the major acknowledged the salute by a nod, and took up his position before the fireplace; Mrs. Clanroy inclined the upper part of her stout person a little, and smiled; while the maiden lady removed the spectacles which she wore, screwed her eyes together, and said—

'How d'ye do, Mr. Caliper?'

'I trust I have not kept any one waiting?' said Mr. Caliper pleasantly.

'Not at all, if I may speak for myself,' the major replied from the hearthrug. 'I believe you know, Caliper, what we wanted to see you about?'

'I had the advantage of a letter of instructions from Miss Vivian,' answered the solicitor, bending towards the lady with the spaniel. 'I gather that there is some ambiguity as to the position of Miss Madeleine Vivian—her title to inherit——'

'It's all ambiguity from beginning to end, as far as I can see,' the major interrupted. 'The long and short of it is, Castlemere is asserted to have made two wills.'

'So strange of poor dear Castlemere,' observed Mrs. Clanroy, in a small cheerful voice. 'I'm sure I can't understand——'

'Well, it isn't expected of you, Gertrude,' said the major drily. 'One of these wills,' he went on to Caliper, 'was in favour of Madeleine—we know about that; but then, here's this other affair is said to have been in favour of—er—of some child of his in America, that nobody ever heard anything about.'

'You will never persuade me,' observed Miss Vivian, with an accent of settled conviction, 'that Castlemere was capable of doing anything of the kind.'

'Well, as to that, Maria, I take it most young fellows of under

thirty (as Castlemere would have been then) are—er—capable of having a son,' said the major, with a consciousness of humour. The solicitor looked up at the cornice and stroked his chin.

'What I mean is,' returned Maria, who was not humorous, 'Castlemere would not have ventured to marry Lady Castlemere, if this had occurred, without letting her and me know about it. I knew Castlemere pretty well, I should hope, and you will never persuade me that he would keep a secret like that from me all his life.'

'With regard to this alleged issue,' said Mr. Caliper, in a strictly neutral tone, 'do I understand that it would be the fruit of—ahem—a morganatic——'

Mrs. Clanroy sighed, as much as to say that the strangeness of poor dear Castlemere was such as to transcend statement. Miss Vivian said 'Pish!' and stroked her spaniel irritably. The major replied—

'No; that's the point. The assertion is that he married the girl—what's her name? Annette—something French.'

'Malgrè,' supplemented Mrs. Clanroy, very softly.

'Annette Malgrè,' said the major, with the air of having just remembered it for himself. 'Married her, you know, and took her to America, and then left her there. And then the girl died while he was over here, so he never went back; that's the long and short of it.'

Mr. Caliper appeared to meditate.

'Is Lord Castlemere known to have been in America at the time this alleged occurrence is maintained to have taken place?'

'I believe he was,' the major admitted, doubtfully.

'I recollect the letter telling him of the late baron's death was sent to America,' observed Mrs. Clanroy, gently.

'Any one would think you wanted to prove him guilty, Gertrude!' exclaimed her unmarried sister, indignantly.

'Oh, guilt be hanged!' said the major; 'this is a more serious matter. He was there—that's the long and short of it; and we've got here a copy of their marriage certificate, and of the boy's birth.' He pointed to some papers on the table.

'From whom were these obtained?' inquired the solicitor, after he had taken up the papers and examined them.

'Some old fellow who said he was the girl's father. He said he had seen the certificate of the birth made out himself, the other was handed to him by Castlemere himself, at their interview last June, along with the two wills. The dates seem to correspond well enough.'

'Why don't you say that the originals of his certificates were not forthcoming? He pretended they were stolen on the same night Castlemere died—a likely story! And the will in the boy's favour stolen too—most opportunely! I tell you we have nothing but his word for the whole thing. I have the worst suspicions of his motives; and you shall never persuade me——'

'Wait a moment, Maria—let's have fair play all round,' said the

major. 'What we're concerned about is the honour of the family, I take it; and we shall no more secure that by suppressing the story if it's true, than by believing it if it isn't. Now, what we do know is this: Castlemere was in Paris at the time he's said to have met this girl there; he was at Havre about the time he's said to have married her there; well, then he's in America—in this backwoods town, whatever it is——'

'Suncook was the name, I think,' came from Mrs. Clanroy.

'Suncook, you know,' went on the major, turning himself away from his wife and towards the solicitor; 'he was there at the time he was said to have been living there with her. And then there's the most curious thing of all—that he should go back there, you know, after more than a dozen years, and fall in with this old French fellow. What? What should he do that for?'

'He was not, I presume, able definitely to recognise the boy as his son? I think I understood that the child was alleged to have been born during his absence?' said Mr. Caliper.

'He never saw him at all!' exclaimed Miss Vivian, emphasising her statement by shaking her spectacles at the solicitor. 'No boy was to be found, I tell you; of course he was all of a piece with the certificates and the will. I am surprised that you, Mr. Caliper, as a man accustomed to deal with evidence, should countenance this story for one moment.'

'The best method of disproving objectionable statements is to become acquainted with the grounds upon which they are advanced,' replied the solicitor, with a happy mingling of deference and firmness. 'The question that now suggests itself is, whether any of the inhabitants of this town—Suncook—were able to substantiate Monsieur Malgrè's assertions? Was there any knowledge betrayed, on the part of any disinterested party, of a gentleman, answering to Lord Castlemere's description, having visited Suncook at the time named, in company with a lady? And was there, subsequently, any knowledge of a child having been born? I trust I shall be pardoned if I express myself unguardedly; but I understand I was consulted for the purpose of sifting—er——'

'Quite right, Caliper—no need to apologise,' the major declared. 'As to that, Brookes says he spoke with two or three people who seemed to have some recollections on the subject. There was an old woman who owned the house they boarded at; and some other people——'

'And I think, major, Brookes said the old lady had told him she had even been present at the time the child was born,' Mrs. Clanroy interposed, smiling amiably upon her sister as she said it.

The latter lady sat erect in her chair and glared.

'I believe, Gertrude, you would think anything,' she said. 'I presume an old woman in an American backwoods town might be paid to say whatever one wanted. And not only that, Mr. Caliper, but this very old woman of theirs did not pretend to know who those

boarders of hers really were. A "Mr. Floyd" she talked about! It is really quite too barefaced a conspiracy. My brother never kept anything from me in his life, least of all a thing of that kind!'

'Most natural of him, I am sure,' said the solicitor, meaning to be polite; but at that the great lady took a look at him, and chuckled in such a disconcerting way, that poor Mr. Caliper felt his face grow hot, and, for the first time during the colloquy, he ceased to be entirely impartial towards the matter under discussion. But he was not the man to allow that to appear.

'Brookes was, I apprehend, a person in whom his lordship reposed a good deal of confidence?' he said, recovering himself and addressing the major.

'Oh, Castlemere thought everything of Brookes,' was the gallant gentleman's reply. 'Brookes has been in the family for over twenty years. Castlemere would never have got over to America if he hadn't had Brookes and his wife to go with him. I'm only surprised that Brookes doesn't know more about this affair than he appears to do.'

'Ah! I was thinking of that—whether anything could have transpired between them relative to Lord Castlemere's object in undertaking the journey.'

'Nothing definite, so far as I am aware,' the major said.

'Perhaps if Mr. Caliper were to put a few questions to Brookes——?' Mrs. Clanroy suggested in her musical tones.

'Of course; I was about to propose that,' said her husband, who, to do him justice, would have done so had the idea occurred to him in time. 'We'll have him up at once,' and he rang the bell. 'Tell Brookes to look in for a few moments,' he said to the servant.

'I must say, Arthur,' observed Miss Vivian, in the moderate tone which she seldom used except when she was really angry, 'that it is scarcely considerate in you to ask an old and respectable servant of my brother's family to give evidence likely to damage his master's memory. If I thought there were any chance of such evidence being forthcoming I should protest very decidedly. Mr. Caliper, of course, only acts according to his instructions; and I am not so much surprised that Gertrude should forget what was becoming; but your position, as Lord Castlemere's chief executor, is so responsible and delicate——'

'Hang it, Maria, isn't that the very reason why I'm doing it?' cried the major, passing his hand across his brow and drawing his eyebrows together, so that he looked much more terrible than he really was. 'I don't know what you're up to, unless you're angry because Castlemere may have done something he didn't tell you about.' Here Maria secretly bit her lip, for her brother-in-law had blundered pretty near the truth. The major continued: 'You can't suppose I want to see a raw boor from an uncivilised country come over here and take possession, can you? Of the two, I'd rather it should go to Madeleine—though I've got my opinion about that, too! But what I want, and what I mean to do, is to get at the bottom of

this story, so far as it's possible. We don't want any mysteries hanging over us, I take it.'

'I'm sure I think Maria's irritation most excusable, my dear,' said the ever genial and benevolent Gertrude. 'Her position here is so difficult, you know—so anomalous! I'm sure I wish poor dear Castlemere could have arranged to let her have some considerable share—it would have been so much more comfortable and agreeable for all parties.'

'Thank you, Gertrude,' said Maria, grimly laconic.

The two ladies often had sparring matches of this kind, and Gertrude generally got the better of her saturnine and positive sister—at all events for the moment. But Maria never forgot, and was sometimes able to revenge herself long afterwards. Gertrude, however, enjoyed one telling advantage over Maria—she knew Maria's great pitiable secret. This secret was, that Maria, in her romantic days, and before she knew how ugly she was, had loved the major, then Lieutenant Clanroy. And Clanroy might have married her, only that Gertrude stepped in and carried him away without giving him time for reflection. Maria bled in silence; she would never have said a word about the matter to any human being; but Gertrude had as good as known it from the beginning, and one day, in the course of a particularly violent quarrel, she taunted her with it. A terrible scene followed; but ever afterwards, along with her hatred, a crippling dread weighed upon Maria lest Gertrude should betray her to the gentleman most concerned. Rather than that should happen Maria would die on the spot. Gertrude, on the other hand, knew her power, and by merely hinting at her possession of it could make her stronger and abler sister tremble and turn faint. Though her love for Arthur Clanroy had many years since become a withered and lifeless thing, never to be resuscitated, yet her fear of exposure and shame was, if anything, more keen than ever. It was an untoward affair, however you looked at it; for Gertrude's marriage had been anything but a domestic success; she and her husband cared for each other no more than do a couple of portraits hanging side by side on a wall; not only that, but the major was intolerably bored by his wife, and she, with the small acuteness that belonged to her, knew where his harassable points were and how to irritate them. After all, Maria would have suited him better, for she had brains and character, and might have made, if she had had the chance, a tender and excellent wife. But enough of these things, which belong to the irrevocable past.

Meanwhile Mr. Caliper looked on, with a cynical smile inside him. He knew perfectly well that these great people would not have wrangled thus before him, had he been their social equal. No: he was no more to them than a chair or a table: what he thought or heard made no difference to anybody. Not one of them had even thought of asking the family solicitor to sit down!

CHAPTER XV.

Showing the difficulty of getting at the exact truth in matters which are not really complicated to those who are in a position thoroughly to understand them.

BROOKES came in, a composed, broad-faced, straightforward old man, with an admirable instinct of fine behaviour, such as may still occasionally be observed in the best class of English servants. His presence helped Mr. Caliper to feel more at ease than he had as yet been able to do; for there could be no doubt that Brookes ranked below him in the social scale. But then Brookes knew it, and did not allow it to trouble him, which slightly diminished Mr. Caliper's advantage.

In response to the lawyer's interrogatories, Brookes told his tale. He had accompanied his master and Madeleine to America; they took Jane, his wife, with them, to look after the young lady. Lord Castlemere had not told him why he wished to go to America, though he had seemed to have some anxiety or preoccupation weighing on his mind; and once he had said to Brookes, 'I shall sleep sounder when this is over, Brookes, whichever way it turns out;' and again, he had more than once said to Madeleine, 'You will always love Uncle Floyd, won't you, no matter what he is forced to do?' Brookes had not understood these utterances, or attached any significance to them, until afterwards. They landed at Boston, and his lordship had gone at once to a certain hotel, and had asked for a certain room, and when told that it was at the moment occupied, he had seemed greatly put out, though the room that was provided him was a much better one. At Boston they hired a carriage and horses, and drove along a road near the sea to Salem, where they spent the night at an inn of which Lord Castlemere seemed to know the name, and in the parlour of which Brookes had seen his lordship standing at the window and tracing with his finger a name which had been written on the pane with a diamond; but what the name was Brookes had not observed. The next day they drove to Newburyport, and the day after that they arrived at Suncook, having started early, at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon.

Lord Castlemere had gone out to walk with Madeleine, and she had afterwards mentioned their having been to a cemetery, and seeing a gravestone there with the name 'Annette' upon it; and this Brookes had himself seen later on. His lordship and Madeleine dined at the hotel, and towards evening they went to an old farmhouse that stood near the sea-shore, and which was inhabited by an old gentleman whom the landlord of the hotel called Mossy Jakes. What occurred in that place Brookes could not tell of his own knowledge, since he had never seen his lordship alive again. He had waited up for him the greater part of the night, but had not gone after him, be-

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cause his lordship had given special orders that he was on no account to be disturbed. The next morning very early, however, he had gone down the lane towards the farmhouse, carrying some things for Madeleine, which Jane had thought the child would need. About half way he came to a little rising ground, and there, seated on a stone with his face towards the rising sun, he was astonished to behold the figure of Lord Castlemere. He spoke to his lordship, but received no answer; then he looked in his face and touched him, and knew that he was dead. He must have been dead several hours. The medical gentleman who was summoned from Boston said that death ensued from fatty degeneration of the heart. But Brookes did not stop to ask about that then.

'At once I thought of Miss Madeleine,' Brookes said, continuing his story, 'and on I went to the farmhouse, as quick as I could put one foot afore another; and the body I left meantime where it was. When I got there, I knocked at the door, without getting an answer; so, the door being off the latch, I made so bold as to go in. I found a room with a man in it, and at first I thought he was dead too; for down he was kneeling in front of a chair, that had some old worm-eaten clothes on it, and a portrait of a very nice-looking young lady resting against the back of the chair. The old man, he knelt there with his face down on the clothes; and I hardly liked to use my voice to him, for surely, thought I, he is dead too. But the next minute he opened his eyes and stared at me, and I said, "Where is my young lady, sir?" But it was a long while before I could get him to take what I was saying; he was half-dazed, and his legs they were cramped in a manner to prevent his getting up till I helped him; and, add to that, his knowledge of English was very faulty. However, at last he understood me; and said he, "She went away with Floyd Vivian the past evening." When I heard that I was in a tremble; for, thinks I, "She's strayed into the sea and got drowned, or she's lost in the woods." So I began to tell him that Lord Castlemere was dead; but all the time he wasn't hearing me, so busy he was hunting over the table and among the books and papers for something, I couldn't tell what, only he seemed terrible anxious to find it. Then all of a sudden he called out loud, as if he'd been hurt, and caught hold of me, and said that I had robbed him. So it turned out that he had lost some papers which had been left on the table the night before. But I had no time to hear about that then; it was my business to find Miss Madeleine. So back I ran to the village, and set them to ringing the bells and firing the gun, and squads of them set out, some one way and some another, to search. It happened I went towards the south, and Jane, she was with me. And we hadn't made over a quarter of a mile, shouting out every now and again, so that the child might know of us, if she were in hearing, when who should we see coming to meet us, quite quietly, but Miss Madeleine herself. We were very glad, indeed, as you may think. You could see by her face that she had been crying; but it wasn't from fear of being lost

and not seeing us again, for she behaved quite cold and indifferent to us; 'twas something else, but what she wouldn't say.'

'What account did Miss Madeleine give of herself?' the solicitor inquired at this point.

'None whatever, sir, not that I know of, from that day to this.'

Mr. Caliper stuck out his under lip and rubbed his chin. 'Well, proceed with your statement,' he said at length. 'What transpired in the matter of those papers which the Frenchman accused you of stealing?'

'He didn't stay by that notion long, sir. At first he was quite bewildered, and, as it were, foolish; but in a while his thoughts and memory came back to him; but the story he told was a right strange one, take it how you would.'

'Indeed, Brookes, I fully agree with you,' remarked Miss Vivian, who, of course, had listened to all this before, and come to her own conclusions upon it.

'Now, Maria, no influencing the witness, you know!' said the major pleasantly.

'The amount of it was,' continued Brookes, 'that Lord Castlemere had called on him that afternoon, and told him that this French girl that was buried in the cemetery had been his wife; and upon that the Frenchman had told him that he was her father—a thing which surprised everybody, for it seemed no one in the village had suspected as much before. Then his lordship had asked him whether there was a child living; and when he heard there was, he had shown two wills, one made in case there should be such a child, you see, and the other the one for Miss Madeleine. Then they arranged to meet the next morning, and have the boy there, to identify him and the like, and make him the heir, and tear up the will for Miss Madeleine. But that could never be, because of his lordship's dying as he did on the way home; and the boy, he was gone too; but whether dead or alive nobody could tell.'

'Was there any collateral evidence of this boy's existence?'

'Oh, everybody in the village knew of him, sir; and few there were had a good word to say of him. They said he was a wild, reckless lad, and would never go to school or church; and for some years past he had lived in a cave in the woods that had a bad name, and saw none but Indians and wild beasts; only once in a while he would come to the Frenchman's farmhouse, for he and the Frenchman were always on terms, more or less.'

'Was anything known of the circumstances of the boy's birth?'

'There were some who said they remembered it, sir; but none of them had recognised Lord Castlemere. The gentleman who had been with the young French lady had given the name of Floyd.'

'Now, about the disappearance of those papers?' said Mr. Caliper, sticking his eyeglass into his eye, and speaking sharply. 'How did he account for that, eh?'

'I wasn't able clearly to understand much about it, sir,' Brookes

replied steadily. 'He spoke something of a stranger who had come to his house the same day as Lord Castlemere arrived; he had called himself a clergyman of the Church of England, and was in the midst of telling him something about Lord Castlemere, when my lord himself came in sight down the lane, with Miss Madeleine. Upon that the clergyman dodged into the house and shut himself into a room, and Mr. Mossy Jakes forgot all about him until the next day; and then when he went to look for him, he was gone. So putting what they had talked about together, with the papers being gone, Mr. Jakes was all for believing the clergyman was the man who took them, he himself being at the time in a kind of dream or a vision, and not distinguishing rightly what was what.'

'What was this clergyman's name?'

'He couldn't quite remember, sir; it was Purdy, or Maddox, or something between them he thought; but he'd not paid attention so as to be certain.'

'Something between Purdy and Maddox!' repeated the solicitor, expelling his eye-glass from its position with a snap. 'But could no one else in the village come nearer to it?'

'No one else in the village had seen the man at all, sir.'

This answer surprised Mr. Caliper, who seemed to be getting farther and farther from the light with every new question he put. It really looked as if there were a conspiracy on foot to bewilder the seeker after truth. The worst of it was, that nothing appeared to happen according to any conceivably consistent theory of motive, one circumstance contradicted another. 'Was any systematic search instituted to discover the boy; or was any explanation brought forward of his disappearance?' Mr. Caliper finally asked.

'We looked for him in the cave he used to live in,' Brookes answered, 'but he was gone out of it; and the big loggan-stone that had stood in front of it was upset and fallen into the gulley. The boy might be anywhere in the woods, but there was a thousand miles of them, be it more or less; and we might have searched from this to ten years, and been no nearer to him.'

'Well, Mr. Brookes, I have no further inquiries to make of you at present,' Mr Caliper said; and, as the old servant withdrew, he turned to the major and added, 'The case is certainly a curious one, but there seems to be as much of it one way as another, and it ought to give you no sort of uneasiness. I should undoubtedly agree with Miss Vivian in pronouncing it a conspiracy, but for the singular fact that the conspiring parties would seem to have given away their only chances of success. Had the missing will and the certificates of birth and marriage been preserved, the question would have resolved itself into simply proving the genuineness of those documents. M. Malgrè, in making his application on his grandson's behalf, would only have needed to put in his evidence, produce the claimant, and await the results, which could not have failed to be in his favour, had the claim turned out to be genuine. This would have been his course supposing

him to have been a true man; and he alleges that he was prevented from taking it by the unexplained disappearance of the evidence on which he relied. No doubt such an excuse would usually be taken as an indication of imposture, but in this instance there was every reason why an impostor should not have made excuses. Lord Castlemere's death came most opportunely for his plans, if they included forgery and personation. In short, there seems to be an obscurity—a link wanting. Had I been acting in the claimant's interest, I should have examined more particularly——'

Here the flow of Mr. Caliper's eloquence, which was beginning to acquire something of the swing and resonance of a solicitor who had in him the making of a barrister, was interrupted by the entrance of no less a person than Miss Madeleine Vivian. She had been out for a walk, and still wore her little hat and feather, her jacket trimmed with crape, and her short black petticoat. Her long black hair, hanging down on both sides of her cheeks, made the monotony of her costume more apparent. A mourning garb was not suited to her. She acknowledged the presence of the female element in the room only by a sweeping glance, such as a sovereign might bestow upon her waiting-women; she nodded her head at Major Clanroy, but she went up to the solicitor and said——

'What are you here for, Mr. Caliper?'

Mr. Caliper was a bachelor, and did not know how to deal with children. He made a semi-jocose bow, and said, 'Your obedient servant, Miss Madeleine!'

'Come, Madey, you must run away now; we are talking business,' observed the major.

'I shall not run away, or walk away either. I might tell all you to go away, if it were not for politeness. I am the heiress of Castlemere. You are nothing but my dead uncle's executor. If there's any business, I must hear it,' said this young lady, majestically.

'Perhaps Madey can tell us something about the mysterious clergyman,' suggested Mrs. Clanroy.

'Such ideas ought not to be put into the child's head,' said Miss Vivian. 'How could she tell us anything about a clergyman who never existed?'

'Oh, I know what you are talking about,' said Madeleine, tossing back her hair. 'It is about what happened in the American village.'

'And did you see or hear anything of a clergyman calling himself some name like Purdy or Maddox?' her married aunt persisted.

'It was not any name like that,' returned Madeleine, with the scorn of superior knowledge and intellect. 'The name he said was one I knew very well; and he said he was—but I didn't believe what he said. He was too ugly a man to be that.'

'I am afraid you are making this up out of your head,' said the cunning aunt, playfully.

Madeleine regarded the rotund lady with withering contempt. 'You wish to make me say things when I am angry that I had not

meant to say. I like Aunt Maria better than you, because she is more honourable—Mr. Caliper, why are you standing up?'

To this quite unexpected question the ever-ready solicitor was for once unprepared to reply. He gave a short laugh, stood on the other leg, twirled his eye-glass, and said, 'Oh, I—er—I'm——'

'No one has offered you a chair—I know!' interrupted Madeleine, who was now thoroughly embarked in her favourite character of mistress of a great household. 'Mr. Caliper, please to sit down in that chair. Mr. Caliper, I shall offer you a glass of wine. Uncle Arthur, you may touch the bell, if you will be so kind. I will have the wine brought.'

'Gad, so it shall!' exclaimed the major, immensely delighted with this behaviour, though it reflected upon himself as much as anybody; but spirit and independence were to him irresistible qualities in a woman. 'And I'll drink your health, Caliper, when the wine comes,' he added. 'Meanwhile, all I can say is, that if you haven't had a seat, neither have I!'

The aspect of affairs having been thus improved, Madeleine deposited herself in a large chair, and said, 'Now you see I am not saying it because I am angry. I will tell some things, and I won't tell some others. He said his name was Murdoch Vivian, and that he was my father.'

As might be supposed, this statement produced a sensation. The first feeling was one of complete astonishment, followed, probably, at a longer or shorter interval, according to the nature of the hearer, by incredulity. How should Murdoch have got to America, and why should he go? That he could have known of Lord Castlemere's intention of visiting Suncook was not to be thought of, for his lordship had confided it to no one. It must be either a romance on Madeleine's part, or, as she had herself suggested, an imposition on the part of the man. And yet, why should anybody pretend to be Murdoch Vivian? Most people would have preferred to assume almost any other character.

'What sort of a looking fellow was he, Madey?' inquired the major at length. 'Was he a short, thin man, with sandy hair and pale eyes?'

'No,' replied Madeleine; and then she described the man's appearance with some minuteness, and the description suited the real Murdoch marvellously well.

'Is that what you remember of your father, Miss Madeleine?' asked Mr. Caliper.

'I don't remember him at all,' the child said; 'but I don't believe he could have been as ugly as this man was. He was uglier than Aunt Maria.'

Hereupon the major betrayed some amusement, causing poor Maria a pang of miserable pain; and Mrs. Clanroy said, 'You should not make remarks to hurt people's feelings;' for which benevolent intervention her sister could have strangled her on the spot.

'At what time and place did you first see this person?' asked Mr. Caliper, who was now really interested.

'He came along the lane in the evening, after Uncle Floyd had sat down on the stone; and he spoke to Uncle Floyd, and Uncle Floyd didn't answer him or look at him; and then he put his finger on Uncle Floyd's hand; and then he looked frightened, and told me to come away to get a doctor. I shall not tell anything more. I wish to have my tea.'

'But I'm sure you will tell us where you went to find a doctor?' said Mrs. Clanroy, insinuatingly.

Madeleine did not deign to make her any response whatever.

'I am going to have my tea,' she said, getting up and marching to the door. 'Good-bye, Mr. Caliper! I hope you enjoyed your chair.' And with that she let herself out, and was seen no more.

'I'll be hanged if I see through it, after all!' the major exclaimed, when there had been a short silence. 'What do you think, Caliper? By Jove, what a saucy little baggage she is! Castlemere was right; she will keep up the credit of the family better than any of us. But what do you think? Looks as if there might be something in it—what?'

'My opinion would be, Major Clanroy,' said the lawyer, slowly, 'that in case this story of Mr. Vivian—of his being in Suncook—could be substantiated, it would not only be comprehensible in itself, but it would suggest an explanation of the disappearance of the documents, and even of the boy. It would be to the Reverend Mr. Murdoch Vivian's advantage that nothing should stand between his daughter and the Castlemere property. I need say no more than that. But in whatever way the affair may turn out, Major Clanroy and ladies,' concluded Mr. Caliper, rising, 'one thing is certain, that we have nothing to do but to await events. The labouring oar is distinctly and entirely with the other side. Until they do something, we can do nothing; and if they should omit to do anything within the next few years, they will be too late; for Miss Madeleine will have reached the age entitling her to enter into possession.'

'But how if this boy were to appear, with all his proofs, afterwards?' meditated Mrs. Clanroy, aloud.

'That would be a capital thing for Caliper, I take it, and the rest of those Chancery Lane fellows, but not of much advantage to us,' said the jocund major. 'Well, the whole thing sounds like a story in a book—just as queer and just as credible. For my part, I don't believe half so much of it as I did before I knew how much reason there is to believe! But you're quite right, Caliper; we have nothing to do; and I don't see why we should have, even if the boy appears. After all, Murdoch is as much on Madey's side as we are, and most likely a good deal more so. Let him and M. Malgrè fight it out themselves; I should much prefer being the audience to being the actor in a farce of that kind—what, Maria?'

'There may be something more than a farce in store for us,' said

Maria, with an air of sombre foreboding. 'I always said that Castlemere made a fatal mistake in holding out any hopes to Murdoch; and now Murdoch has been to America concocting plots with this miserable Frenchman. Between the pair of them, there'll be nothing of the property left, or of the family honour either, which you make such a show of caring about, Arthur.'

From these observations it may be inferred that Miss Vivian, like many other people, had learned that, in cases where reason and understanding did not avail, the most effective card to play was prejudice.

While the major was explaining to his sister-in-law that she was taking sides against herself, so far as she could be said to be doing anything, Mrs. Clanroy had beckoned Mr. Caliper to approach her.

'Now tell me what you really think,' she murmured in a smiling undertone; and she glanced up in his face as she said it.

The solicitor fancied he detected, in this private appeal, something significant or particular. He began some reply, but the lady interrupted him.

'Never mind now, Mr. Caliper,' she said; 'you shall talk to me some other time—I will let you know. I was only thinking, in case of there being any difficulty about deciding between the wills, whether some other arrangement might not be made for the property. It is in our hands for the present, you know. Some other time. Good-day!'

'She wants to contest the will—the old Pharisee!' said Mr. Caliper to himself, as he got into his cab, and was driven to the City. 'It won't do. But if she's in want of an occupation, I don't know that I could recommend her a more—public-spirited one!'

CHAPTER XVI.

Which introduces the reader to a remarkable and not altogether prepossessing personage; and describes a patent of his invention.

On a clear blue morning in the latter part of this same month of September, a man and a cart were moving lazily along a country road in the northern portion of Devonshire. The road sloped and clambered over hill and dale, and at its higher points gave lovely views of breezy, azure seas. It had showered over night, and the road was brown and damp, without being in puddles. The hedges glistened with drops, and the cobwebs were works of art in silver gauze. The air came cool and sweet from the west, and whitish clouds merged with the horizon in that region. Upon the broad sides of the uplands white dots of sheep grazed. A mile or two towards the north-west the rectangular contour of a large country seat rose above the encompass-

ing shoulders of foliage. The mounting sun shone softly upon it, and a window here and there threw back a diamond glister.

The cart of which mention has been made was a small affair—not much more than an enlarged handcart, with a grey donkey between the shafts. It was painted a fine peacock blue, and the ribs and wheels were picked out in warm lines of red. Upon the side, in the upper forward corner, was written in thin white letters the legend, '*B. Sinclair, Licensed Pedlar.*' A bit of tarpaulin was thrown over the contents of the cart, but without completely covering them; so that one could see that the pedlar's stock consisted of books. Underneath the cart swung a basket some two feet in diameter, closely covered over. The donkey which drew this brilliant vehicle was an excellent specimen of his tribe; his coat was well brushed, his legs slim and neat, his barrel roomy, his tail an appendage of real elegance, with a vivacious flirting movement to it. His ears were of superb length, with a long fringe of soft hair on the inside edges; and the donkey's master held one of them in his hand and caressed it as they sauntered along together.

His master, the pedlar, was a man of rather remarkable appearance. He was five feet eight inches in height, but so broad shouldered and deep chested as to appear shorter. His neck was thick and muscular, and the head which it supported was square and massive—very capacious behind, flat on the top, and strongly developed both behind and above the ears. The forehead was wide across the temples and compactly moulded throughout; and there was an impression of great power in the brows and the blue eyes underneath them. The hair of this man was short and of a vigorous red hue, and had the look of having lately been rubbed over with a towel, for it stood up in all directions. The beard matched the hair in colour, but was of wirier consistency, and grew thinly on the chin, revealing that feature's resolute prominence. The cheek-bones were high and broad, betokening a bold and adventurous type of character; the nose was straight, and had full nostrils; the mouth was rather small than otherwise, with sharply cut lips. The man's complexion was sunburnt to something approaching the colour of brick-dust; he whistled as he walked along, and every now and then, between the pauses of his tune, the tip of a noticeably slender and pointed tongue slipped from his mouth and passed itself along his upper lip. The trick seemed in some way characteristic of one phase of the fellow's nature—of a certain acuteness and self-sufficient complacency.

He was without either hat or coat, but his shirt was as white and fine as if it were fresh from the laundry; over it was drawn a waistcoat of corduroy, unbuttoned; he wore knee-breeches of the same material, and thick blue stockings covered the knotted calves of his legs. His arms were long in proportion to his height, and the shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbow displayed a muscular development that would have done honour to a blacksmith; the hands, however, were small. Such was the figure that trudged along the quiet road, with

the breeze blowing into his open shirt front, and an expression free from care. In fact, he was in the best of spirits and condition, and didn't care who knew it; and his whistling was as exuberant as it was highly finished and artistic.

By-and-by he arrived at the summit of a low hill, from the brow of which the road dipped into a shallow valley, rising again on the further side. The pedlar had got about half way down the hither incline, when the tramp of hoofs and roll of wheels caught his ear, and looking up he saw a couple of big farm-horses, dragging a heavy waggon behind them, coming towards him at a thumping trot down the opposite slope. At the rate they were going they would meet him at a point some distance this side of the lowest part of the valley. The roadway was here very narrow, so that there was barely room for the big and the little vehicles to pass each other without one of the two going into the ditch. As the big team drew near, the driver of it brandished his whip and cracked it twice or thrice, as if to warn the small team to get out of the way. The pedlar, however, kept on at his former leisurely pace in the very centre of the road, until not more than half-a-dozen rods intervened between his donkey and the steeds of the other party. Then he halted his peacock-blue cart and advanced a few paces in front of it.

'Look out! A'll run over thee!' shouted out the driver of the horses, in his broad Devonshire, which I cannot pretend accurately to reproduce. It certainly did look very much as if the pedlar would be run over, and his donkey and cart after him. The horses were close upon him, and coming on with all the impetus of their late descent.

But the pedlar suddenly spread out his arms and made a jump off the ground, causing the horses to swerve; the next moment he seized one of them by the rein close to the bit, pushing his head violently towards the other and bringing both to a standstill, the waggon lying slantwise across the road. Having accomplished this feat, which was perhaps less difficult than it looked, and disregarding the angry objurgations that were hurled at him by the driver, he walked back to his cart, took a book out of it, and returned with it in his hand. Meanwhile the driver of the horses had jumped to the ground, with his whip in his hand, and an expression upon his face that betokened mischief. He was a tall brawny fellow in the prime of manhood and strength.

'Noo, look'ee here, young man, what did 'ee do that for?' he demanded, shaking the handle of his whip within an inch of the other's nose.

'I wanted you to buy this book for one thing,' replied the pedlar, holding up the volume.

'Buy that book!' repeated the other with a roar of indignant amazement. 'None o' thy larks noo; a' won't 'ave it.'

'And for another thing,' the pedlar continued, quite unmoved, 'I wanted you to turn out and let me pass. This road is too narrow for both of us.'

The teamster paused, as if his thoughts were too great for utterance.

'Zay, do'ee know who a' be?' he inquired at length.

'So far as I am concerned, you are my customer,' was the answer. 'Now, this book was written by a man named Smollett——'

'That for thy book!' interrupted the teamster, striking it out of the pedlar's hand with a blow of his whip-handle. 'A'm the best man in Bideford—that's who a' be! Zay, wull 'ee fight?'

'If you are the best man in Bideford, they must be an uncivil lot,' observed the pedlar, picking up the book, which had fallen face downwards. 'See how you have soiled this book; however, since you're going to buy it, it doesn't so much matter. Fight? Certainly, if you wish it. But I tell you beforehand that I shall hurt you more than you will like.'

The other laughed, measuring the pedlar with his eye.

'A'll zettle thee with one hand,' he said, tossing his whip aside on the grass.

'Thank you. For my part I will engage neither to strike you nor to throw you, nor even to throttle you; but only to make you go down on your knees and howl for mercy, and to pay me two-and-sixpence for the book when you come to yourself again.'

So saying, he placed the book on the grass beside the whip, planted himself in an easy position before his antagonist, whom he looked steadfastly in the face, and intimated that he was ready to begin.

Now the best man in Bideford was not without some claim to the title by which he had designated himself; he was not a person with whom the average country yokel would care to pick a quarrel. He was a fair wrestler; but what he especially valued himself upon was his skill in the noble art of fisticuffs. He had got beyond the stage of sweeping semicircular blows, and knew how to hit out from the shoulder. At the present juncture, however, he did not anticipate any serious call upon his powers; partly because the pedlar was so much shorter than he was, and partly because the short man's way of talking and behaving had inspired him with the notion that he was some sort of comedian or mountebank, who meant no harm to anybody, but who relied for his livelihood upon the coolness and audacity with which he played off his practical jokes. Being under this impression, the champion of the neighbourhood found a large part of his anger had evaporated; he did not wish to appear incapable of taking a jest; though at the same time he felt it incumbent upon himself to show the jester that it would not do to carry matters too far with him. Accordingly, keeping his left hand behind him, he darted out his right, with the fist only half clenched, intending to administer a sound cuff on his adversary's head, and so have done with it. But the pedlar parried the attack even more carelessly than it was made; nor did two or three other more earnest offers meet with any better success.

Seeing this, the champion drew himself together and set his teeth. 'If thou wult ha' it, tak' it!' he said, and sent in a blow as swift as winking and as hard as the kick of a horse. It was aimed to land between the pedlar's eyes, and, had it done so, must have altered his profile. But the pedlar ducked his head, allowing the champion's fist to graze his red hair; and at the same moment the Bideford man found his antagonist inside his guard, and was aware that by a mere letting out of the arm that wily individual had it in his power to dislocate his jaw. The pedlar, however, disengaged laughing, and stood nonchalantly on guard as before.

Thereupon being nettled, and having also incidentally discovered that there was a firmness of muscle in this red-headed fellow which seemed to require something more than child's play to overcome it, the champion laid aside his contempt and went at his man with both hands and with his best force and ability. But it appeared absolutely impossible to plant a hit on him; and all the time the pedlar himself had never once offered to strike in return, though he had had at least half-a-dozen excellent chances. At last the Bideford man summoned all his energies, and despatched a blow which, as far as good-will and vigour were concerned, certainly deserved to finish the combat. But the pedlar, who, unlike his opponent, was neither flurried nor out of breath, saw the thunderbolt coming, and suddenly bent his right elbow and lifted it. The thunderbolt struck it fairly upon the point; there was a dolorous sound as of cracking bones, and also a sharp shout of pain. The champion had broken the knuckle of his middle finger, and badly sprained his wrist. And there stood the pedlar, comfortably smiling, and apparently as fresh as when they began.

The sight maddened the best man in Bideford, and his thoughts from warlike waxed homicidal. Uttering a short and savage roar, he rushed at his man and caught him in a wrestling grip. If he could not hammer him to pieces, at all events he could dash him to the earth and crush the life out of him. But even here the brawny champion was to meet disappointment. He had got hold, not of a man, but of an oak tree rooted in the soil; an oak tree, moreover, whose arms compressed him with a clasp, the like whereof he had never either felt nor imagined till now. In vain he tugged and strove, throwing a fury of power into each effort; the pedlar stood as if his feet were planted in the centre of the earth, and the gripe of his arms made the Devonshire man's ribs bend like whalebone, and forced the breath gasping from his lips. Then slowly and irresistibly he was bent backwards, until his spine felt on the point of snapping; then, suddenly his feet flew from the earth, and he knew that the next moment he would crash head foremost on the ground. Instead of that, however, he found himself standing free on his legs once more, not knowing how he came so, but inclined to think that he must have made a complete revolution in the air. And there was the red-headed pedlar coolly taking off his waistcoat, which had got torn all across the back.

'What a strong fellow you are, to be sure!' he observed, examining the rent; 'I had that piece put in new only last week. Luckily I brought a needle and thread in the basket. However, we'll finish this affair first. Come on!'

'No; a'll ha' no more on't. Go your ways,' sullenly replied the champion.

'I mean to; but first, you know, you must go down on your knees and beg for mercy; and then you must pay me half-a-crown for the book. Those were my terms, you remember,' said the pedlar, following him up as he retired towards the waggon, and laying his hand on his arm.

The champion turned and looked down on him from his six feet of hitherto unconquered British manhood. Was it really possible that this fellow could have beaten him? Must there not be some mistake about it—some trickery? Might not another trial have a different issue? At all events, the idea of begging the pardon of a man four inches shorter than himself was not to be entertained for a moment, still less of buying his book.

The champion expressed what he meant in explicit, though not original phrase, when, shaking off the other's hold, he growled sturdily—

'A'll see thee damned first!'

'That's a fine fellow!' exclaimed the pedlar, with his peculiar sly laugh. 'Now, then, I'll put you up to something. When you gripped me last time, you took a bad hold. You should have passed your arm across my shoulder, and tried a trip. Your height will give you an advantage there, you see. Oblige me by making the experiment—so!'

This time it seemed to the champion that he had an advantage indeed. He could not, indeed, immediately throw his enemy, but he could move him. They quartered over the ground, and several times the Bideford man almost thought he had succeeded; but each time the other skilfully eluded the trip. Meanwhile they were getting nearer and nearer to the waggon. The champion, who was working his very best, was panting to the full compass of his lungs, and his hair was matted with sweat; but the pedlar, though breathing deeply, did not seem at all distressed; it occurred to him of Devonshire that he was not putting forth his full strength. The thought that he should be played with stimulated him to the pitch of frenzy, and grinding his teeth together, he drew in his breath for a supreme struggle. But just then he was whirled round, and his shoulders came in contact with the wheel of his waggon; and then he knew that his time had come.

The left arm of the pedlar, which was round the champion's neck, tightened, and the latter felt for the first time how enormous was the power against which he had been fighting. He was caught in a trap from which there was no escape; he could not push the pedlar away, nor get hold of his arm to unclasp it; and the wheel at his

back prevented any attempt to get free in that direction. Gradually the pedlar drew his head down to his left shoulder; and having clamped it there, he applied the knuckles of his right hand to the hollow of the unlucky man's temple, pressing and working them into it with unrelenting force. Whoever cares to make the experiment may easily convince himself that the pain caused by this treatment soon becomes insupportable. In fact, there are few forms of torture less endurable. A very terrible and furious scene now began. The Bideford champion fought like a mad tiger to get free. He wrenched himself from side to side, he wriggled, he twisted, he beat frantically with his hands upon the pedlar's back and sides, tearing his shirt to shreds, and burying his nails in the smooth hard flesh; he kicked, he stamped, he gnashed his teeth; and all the while, without an instant's cessation, that fearful hardness went on boring into his brain, and a pair of terrible blue eyes stared derisively into his own, and ever and anon the tip of a pointed tongue slipped out between a pair of smiling lips, curled across them, and slipped in again. Those eyes and that tongue were never forgotten by the Bideford man to his dying day; and many a time did he awake from sleep, with horror in his soul, having dreamt that they were before him again.

Man is fortunately so constituted as not to withstand infernal suffering indefinitely; and the present instance was no exception to the rule. After a few minutes the victim's strength left him, and his struggles became merely convulsive. He lifted his arms at short intervals with a spasmodic movement, the hands quivering; a thin, shrill shriek came quavering in gasps from his throat; his eyeballs rolled up, the eyelids closing, opening, then closing again. Finally, a ghastly pallor overspread the face, upon which a cold moisture broke forth; the lips turned a bluish hue; the labouring chest collapsed, and the lately vigorous body sagged downwards, a limp dead-weight. The man had fainted from sheer agony. When the pedlar was convinced that there was no sensation left in him he removed his knuckles from his antagonist's temple, unclasped his arm from his neck, and laying hold of the body dragged it to the side of the road and laid it out upon the grass. Then stooping, with his hands on his knees, he contemplated it curiously for a few moments. Except for a slight discoloration on the temple there was no mark to indicate the deadly torture which this lump of insensible clay had undergone.

'Sinclair's Patent!' said the pedlar to himself with a low chuckle. 'I ought to apply to Her Majesty for letters of protection, instead of which I have communicated the invention, by practical demonstration, to at least half a dozen persons during the last two years.' He stood erect, and contemplated his tattered shirt with a sort of comic ruefulness. 'Look at that now!' he said; 'would not any one say that I had been the more hardly used of the two? These fellows have no manners. I wonder whether I shall ever meet with a man who will fight fair to the end! My Bideford friend fell to kicking like a mule and scratching like a cat as soon as he found

himself in chancery. He has bruised my shins, and I do believe my shoulders are bleeding. They are! Well, it serves me right! I am too much of a child for this world; so infatuated with my little patent as to endure any amount of inconvenience and rough usage rather than forego the pleasure of applying it. Be a man, Sinclair! and deny yourself once in a while, if only to show that you are able to do it. Well, well! this is my last indulgence for the present. Bideford is the goal of my pilgrimage, and a right pleasant pilgrimage it has been; delicious weather, lovely scenery, lots of fun with the books and the bumpkins, not to mention one or two really Homeric combats. And now I resume the fetters of civilisation once more. But let me hasten to my toilet. I wonder what the Maurices would say if they could see me now!'

While speaking he had stripped off the shreds of his shirt, thereby disclosing a torso like that of a Hercules, polished and white as ivory, and bound about and plaited with great muscles that swelled and knotted as he moved. A small brook trickled through the fields, and passed beneath a low bridge at the dip of the road, and to this Mr. Sinclair betook himself, and subjected the superior parts of his person to a careful washing. He made use of the torn shirt as a towel, afterwards bundling it up and tossing it into the stream. Finally he returned to the cart, unstrapped the basket from underneath and took out a fresh shirt, as crisp and immaculate as a laundress could make it. Having put this on, Mr. Sinclair went to take a look at his late antagonist, who had as yet showed no signs of moving from the position in which he lay. He placed his hand over the unconscious man's heart, felt his pulse, pulled up his eyelid and examined his eye; and being by these investigations satisfied that something ought to be done, he procured a tin dipper from his cart, filled it with water, and dashed the contents sharply on the other's face. After repeating this treatment three or four times symptoms of life began to show themselves, and in a little while the fallen champion opened his eyes to a world of pain and wondered how he came there.

CHAPTER XVII.

Contains more of the sayings and doings of the red-headed pedlar; and portrays a scene in a hitherto unacted version of the tragedy of 'Undine.'

'How do you find yourself now?' the pedlar inquired, bending over him. 'As well as ever?'

The man raised himself on one arm, and pressed the other hand to his head, which felt as if an iron bolt had been forced into it and were gradually expanding. He attempted to say something, but only a weak and semi-articulate sound resulted. He looked up at the

pedlar with a darkened and confused expression, but after a few moments dropped his eyes with a shudder.

'I see—headache and nausea,' observed the pedlar composedly. 'The best of us are subject to such attacks at times. Have a drop of brandy.'

He held a flask of that liquor to the man's lips, who swallowed a few mouthfuls and gave a slight groan. The pedlar stood back, with his arms folded and his chin sunk on his breast, watching him.

'Come,' he exclaimed presently, 'suppose you try and get on your pins. Set your blood moving again, and you'll soon be all right. Take my hand and put your foot against mine—there you are!'

There he was, indeed, a very shaky-looking object. But the pedlar took him by the arm, made him walk up and down, spoke to him in an encouraging tone, slapped him on the back, until, by dint of these and other attentions, he had restored him to something like his conscious self. It was evident, however, that the man's system had received a shock from which it would not soon recover.

Then quoth the pedlar, 'You are getting on famously. If I could spend the day with you I dare say you would have forgotten all about this little affair before supper-time. But, unluckily, we're both business men and have our affairs to attend to. So perhaps the best thing you can do will be to get down on your knees at once and have it over. Then you can take your book, give me my two-and-sixpence, and we'll wish each other good luck. What do you think?'

'Ye wouldn't ask that surely?—ye wouldn't bid me bend the knee to thee, mun?' exclaimed the other in a shaken voice. 'Oh, a' could never look honest man in the face again.'

The pedlar came close up to him, and gazed at him with his odd, derisive smile. 'Pooh! who's to know it?' he said. 'Who would ever believe that a man like you would kneel and beg for mercy to a man like me, who hardly comes up to your ear? I won't tell, and I don't suppose you will. Come—just to help you, I'll count three; and if you're not down by the time I get to three—why, then we'll have our little tussle over again. One—two—'

'O! a'd rather die!' cried the Bideford man, covering his eyes with his hands.

'Three!' said the pedlar. There was an instant's pause and silence. The Bideford man still remained standing. The next instant the pedlar moved closer and laid the knuckle of his thumb to the discoloured spot on the man's temple. At the touch the man crouched to the earth, as if his legs had crumbled beneath him. There, still keeping his eyes covered with his hands, he mumbled out a few miserable words—few, but enough to rob him of his self-respect and independence for the rest of his life. To some minds it would have been an unpleasant spectacle, but it did not appear at all to dash the spirits of the red-headed pedlar. He walked to the place where the book was lying, picked it up, and returned with it, saying good-humouredly,

'Now we come to the pleasant part. When a man goes down on his knees to me, I always make a point of rewarding him. Here is a work—"Roderick Random"—written by one of the most ingenious and entertaining authors of the last century. If this book had never been written, it would have been a loss to English literature such as could scarcely be estimated in money; and yet I am going to give it to you for half-a-crown! Why, it's a gift fit for a king—and not unworthy, I should hope, of the best man in Bideford! Two-and-sixpence. I should charge any one but you three shillings. But —cash, you know! I'm not able to give credit.'

The man got slowly to his feet. He was the same man who had stepped down from his waggon so haughtily only half an hour before, and yet as different as degradation is different from honour. His shoulders drooped; he kept his eyes averted with a hang-dog look. Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew forth some silver and copper, which he held out to the pedlar.

'Tak' what thou wult,' he said in a muttering tone. 'If ee'd tak' my life into bargain, a'd thank 'ee.'

'Thank you,' returned the other, helping himself to the sum required. 'As to your life, of course it will be more convenient for both of us that you should keep it. A man must be very useless if a dead body is worth exchanging him for. Here's your book; put it in your pocket, and read it at every spare moment; it will remind you of our acquaintance! And don't be down in the mouth, my good fellow. I have been round the world, and seen all sorts of men, from Digger Indians to emperors; and I have seen everywhere men occupying the same relative position that you and I do. Society thinks nothing of it; and the better the society, the commoner it is. One man is the master, the other man is the slave; and the sooner they know it, the more comfortable will they be. There's a bit of worldly wisdom for you, gratis—and quite as true as anything the parson can tell you! So good luck to you. By the way, what is your name?'

'Tom Berne,' he answered, in the same dulled way. 'Little good the name is to me noo.'

'Berne!' The name seemed to strike the pedlar. 'Tom Berne—the same who climbed down the cliff twelve years ago and carried the rope to his brother Hugh?'

'What dost thou know o' that?' demanded Tom Berne, raising his heavy eyes in surprise.

The pedlar gave a whistle, and an expression of annoyance passed across his face. 'I can believe now, Tom Berne, that you were once the best man in Bideford,' he said; 'and if you had told me this before, you might have been so still, so far as I'm concerned. Well —spilt milk is past crying for! Farewell, Tom Berne, and be damned to you! I would rather you had driven your infernal waggon over the cliff than have met me here to-day!'

With this ambiguous adieu, the pedlar took his donkey by the

bridle and pushed on past the waggon and up the hill. He passed over the brow and out of sight without looking round, or altering his pace. Tom Berne, after standing stupidly for some time, with his arms hanging loose by his sides and his head down, heaved a long sigh, picked up his whip, and clambering to his seat, drove on in the opposite direction.

Mr. Sinclair, after proceeding for some distance without betraying his usual appreciation of the charms of the scenery and of his own happy sensations, at length halted his cart and looked about him. A narrow footpath, visible for some distance across the wide fields, reached its end at this point in an old-fashioned country stile. Some trees grew here and there, with a cool spread of turf beneath their shade; a couple of birds were holding a musical discussion in a neighbouring hedge; altogether the spot suited Mr. Sinclair's idea of what a halting-place should be. Accordingly he relieved his donkey from its halter and head-stall, and unbuckled it from the shafts, to graze at its pleasure; while he himself climbed over the stile, carrying with him a needle and thread, a piece of bread and cold sausage, and a book. Having selected a comfortable nook on the other side, he first sewed up the rent in his waistcoat with feminine neatness and dexterity. This done to his satisfaction, he put the waistcoat on, and munched his bread and sausage meditatively. Finally, he produced a cigar-case from his pocket, lit a cigar, and lay down at his ease to read his book, which was a copy of the 'Undine' of De la Motte Fouqué.

He had spent perhaps ten minutes in this innocent occupation, and had got to the best part of the cigar, and the most sentimental passage of the story, when a shadow fell across the page, and he looked up and saw a slim young girl, with black hair and deep black eyes, who was gazing down at him, with her hands clasped behind her back.

'Who are you, man?' she said, when they had inspected one another.

'A pedlar. Who are you, young lady?'

'The mistress of this land. At least I shall be. Why are you here?'

'It's such a nice place. Do you want me to go?'

'No. You look clean. But you have very red hair. Are you orderly?'

'I will be, while I am here. Is that house the place you live in?'

'When we are in the country. In the season I live in London. Only, last summer I was in America. My uncle died there. I am the heiress of his estates.'

'Then you will be very rich, I suppose?'

'The revenues are more than thirty thousand pounds a year. I shall give some of it away, though. I shall give a thousand pounds a year to my father. Then my Aunt Maria has some; but

I think she won't live very long—she is so ugly and so old. She is fifty. Then I shall give half to somebody else, if he comes. Only he won't come, perhaps; he may perish.'

'Is he the gentleman you are going to marry?'

'He isn't a gentleman; at least, his dress isn't, nor the place he lived in. But I can't tell you about him. We exchanged keepsakes. I gave him the miniature; he gave me this arrow-head. But that is a secret. You must not tell anyone.'

'Why do you let me know your secrets? Pedlars sometimes tell secrets.'

'I think you are an honest pedlar. I like you better than I thought I did. Perhaps you are a prince in disguise. You must be very sorry you have such red hair; perhaps it will grow to be black like mine after a good many years. Oh, you have a book. Can you read?'

'I can read some things; but only if I like them. This is a German book about a fairy who lived in the water. Will you sit down and hear about her?'

'Well, a little while. Only you must remember that I am a great lady, and you are nothing but a poor pedlar. Is it a tragedy?'

'A sort of tragedy; the sort that makes you cry and feel nice.'

'Does it make you cry?'

'Yes, if I have had a good dinner and feel comfortable. I was just thinking about crying when you came up.'

'Oh, I'm sorry I prevented you. I like that sort of crying, too—when you're not angry, you know. Sometimes I do that for Shakespeare.'

'Yes, I would do a good deal for Shakespeare myself. But now listen to this. By the way, though, it is too long to read—I'll tell you the first part. Which do you like best—a lovely day like this, with the fresh air and blue sky, the sparkling sea, the trees and grass, the showers and sunshine, the sound of those birds in the hedge, and the tinkle of the sheep-bells over yonder—do you like all this best, or some living human person, like him who gave you that arrow-head?'

'Oh, him, I think,' said the black-eyed girl, musingly; 'though it is more trouble.'

'Yes, a great deal more trouble. Now, according to the writer of this book, the reason is that all this beauty that we see around us, in spite of its beauty, has no soul; but the person who gave you the arrow-head has. Men and women are made, this writer thinks, of something invisible and immortal, that is really themselves; and the part of them that we see, and touch, and hear, is merely a sort of imitation of that immortal invisibility, which grows upon them as the clay of a statue grows upon the idea of it in the sculptor's mind. This imitation is what we call the body; it is made out of the earth; and at last, when the immortal invisibility, which is

our soul, has gone about in that covering for a certain time, it leaves it to its own earth again. But there is this strange thing about our earthly life—that it is a union of something immortal with something that lasts only a few years; and this is the cause of all our sorrows. For our souls forget that they are really separate from our bodies, and when we see people die and disappear, it seems a wrong and a grievance, because of the feeling in us that we should by rights live for ever. In the same way, we wish to do many things—to fly in the air, to be in the presence of those we love, to make some moments stay for years, and some years pass in a moment, to be always young and vigorous, to have the sun shine when we are glad, and the twilight fall when we are thoughtful—a hundred things like these we wish to do, but our bodies prevent us from doing them; and forgetting that we are not our bodies, we feel the sorrow of having desires that cannot be fulfilled. We are like prisoners who see from their prison windows a delightful paradise stretching before them, and who know they have all the faculties to enjoy it; but who cannot do so, because they are chained to the wall. But that is not all. The highest earthly joys we know are, rightly considered, an even greater wrong to us than our sorrows, if our souls and bodies are really the same. For such joys always bring with them the feeling that they are but an imperfect glimpse or hint of far greater and more perfect joys than they. They seem to uplift us to mighty mountain-tops, from which we behold a glorious world that of ourselves we never should have dreamed of. Could anything be more cruel than to let us taste just enough of such delights to whet our appetites, and then to tell us we shall know no more of them? Yet that is what happens to us, if our souls are really one with our bodies. But there is another kind of joys, not so many nor so transcendent as these, but very solid appreciable joys for all that, which we call the pleasures of the body. They are, eating and drinking; having gold in our pockets and gems on our fingers; indulging ourselves with whatever we take a fancy to, without fear of conscience or consequences; being reverenced and obeyed by everybody else;—these are pleasures which belong to the earth we live in, and the more we have to do with them the better satisfied we become to take our earthly life as the only life there is. Yet even here the invisible part interferes and mars our comfort, for by-and-by the pleasures of the body cease to please as they did at first; the bodily senses get dull and tired; and we, instead of taking it as a matter of course, and not minding, as we should do if our bodies only were concerned —instead of that we grieve ourselves with the thought that what little happiness the world could give us is coming to an end, while the memory of what had been still remains. For if we are to enjoy no happiness in the future, it is a cruel and useless injustice to let us remember the happiness of the past.

'Now, my young lady, these facts make us think three things.

The first is, that mankind are the most unfortunate beings conceivable. The second is, that one way to render them happy would be to let the soul (if there is one) live apart from the body in freedom. The third is, that another way would be to let the body live apart from the soul in peace. The former of these alternatives is said to occur after death; but with that we have nothing to do at present. The other is said to have occurred on this earth a great many years ago. In that remote time there existed a race of beings called fairies. They inhabited the earth, the air, and the water, and had magical powers over the element which they severally inhabited, and could transform themselves into it at will. A fairy of the earth, for instance, could appear as a stone or a tree or a blade of grass; an air fairy could transform himself into a whirlwind or a cloud; and a water-sprite could in a moment become a stream, a cataract, or a shower of rain. These fairies had no more soul than the elements from which they sprang, and their aspect was hideous or beautiful, terrible or charming, according to circumstances, as is the case also with water, earth, and air. But although they had no souls there was one way, and one way only, in which they could get a soul put into them. If a mortal man or woman loved a fairy so intimately and unreservedly as to communicate to it the very essence of human love and life, then the germ of a soul would be implanted in the fairy's heart, and it would become human like ourselves, and lose its thoughtless and unremembering happiness—which was merely like the flicker of sunshine, or the sparkle of water or gems, or the hum of insects, having no depth or meaning—and on the other hand, it would live for ever after death, which other fairies do not.'

'Is all that in the book?' inquired the girl.

'Well, some of it is, I believe; and the rest was probably in the mind of the author when he wrote the story of "Undine."'

'But it is about Undine that I wish to hear. Was she a fairy?'

'She was a water-sprite; and her father, being ambitious that she should get a soul, as other fathers are ambitious that their children should get an education—not knowing how much harm it may do them—exchanged her for the mortal child of a certain pious old fisherman. In course of time a noble young knight came riding through the enchanted forest, and fell in love with her; for though she had no soul as yet, and was as changeable and wayward and thoughtless as a rivulet, yet she was extremely beautiful, and laughing, and lovely.'

'I am not laughing, so I am not like her,' observed the listener; 'and you are not like the noble young knight, are you? He couldn't have had hair like yours.'

'Probably not; but after all it is less a matter of hair than of feeling; and there have been times, I believe, when I have felt more like Huldbrand than you ever felt like Undine, as she was before her marriage. For they were married, and a strange, fantastic wedding it was, in the old fisherman's hut, with mysterious sounds and gleams

in the night air, and the tall phantom of a stately man in a white flowing mantle peering in at the window while the priest pronounced them man and wife. And then comes one of the parts that makes me think about crying. For poor little Undine, who had all her life been so light of heart and careless, now began to feel the shadow of a soul stealing over her; and at one moment she shrank from it in bewilderment and dismay; and the next moment broke out in gambols and glancing smiles, as a brook gambols and glances just before it rushes for ever into the unknown shadow of a cavern. Poor little Undine! If I had been Huldbrand, I think I should have driven my dagger through her heart with one hand, while with the other I put on her finger the wedding-ring.'

'Did Huldbrand do that?'

'No, not he. He gave her a soul, as if it had been a golden bracelet, to keep or to cast away; but a soul is a gift that can never be recalled. For my part, if falling in love with a fairy would cure me of my soul and all recollection of it, I would find her and fall in love with her this very afternoon. It's a humbug, young lady, depend upon it. If we have souls destined for heaven, why in heaven's name were they ever sent on earth? When I was about your age, I used to learn a thing called the catechism. This told me, among other things, that there were a great many things I must not do; such as murder, steal, lie, and so forth. But since then, on my way through the world, I have observed that the fairies do all these and worse things, and are never thought the less of for it. Earth, air, and water all commit murder upon occasion, and lie, and steal; and so do bears and sharks and robin redbreasts. But if I do them, though they give me great pleasure and profit in the doing, I hear about my sins immediately, and get punished into the bargain, if any one is by to take the whip to me. But if these things are sins, why was I made to hanker after them; and why does all nature set me an example which I must not follow? And what man is there in this world who has the right to tell me that sin is one thing and virtue another? Where did he learn it? Why, from the catechism. And who wrote the catechism? Why, the Sunday-school teacher. And who taught the Sunday-school teacher? Oh, he found it in the Bible. And who wrote the Bible? Moses and the prophets. And from whom did Moses——'

'Does Huldbrand say all this?' inquired the dark-eyed maiden.

'No; Huldbrand said very little; all he did was to fall in love with another woman and break Undine's heart. And then something happens. Ah! there is a scene for some great actress to make immortal.'

'Then tell me; because, when I am tired of being a great heiress, I mean to be the greatest actress that ever lived.'

'Well, then, act this!' said the pedlar, rising on one knee, while his face became singularly vivid and expressive. 'Think of me as one who has known what is best and purest in the world, and has aspired

to love it and call it his own. And you, who . -e the embodiment of that best and purest, love me, and spend the trea ire of your heart on me; because the divine goodness that is in woman sees even in me the lovely image of itself, which itself has created there. Then, for a time, we are happier than souls in heaven. But a day comes when I fall away from you, and descend to love the lying phantom of you that gives a flattering warmth to baser things. You grieve for me with a holy sorrow, and would fain forgive me, and make good to me the evil happiness that I have chosen. But by an awful and just law, those who have wilfully profaned the sacred innocence of their souls must suffer death; and that death must come through the very innocence they have profaned. So you, Undine, loving me still with the tender and yearning love that all my unworthiness could not overcome, open my guilty door and enter in, to press upon my lips that kiss of death which is the only mercy left me to receive. I see the sweetness of your face—and tears that dim your eyes—I think of all that might have been; but terror and thick darkness are creeping near. As your face bends to mine———'

'No—no! it shall not be, Huldbrand; I will not kill you with a kiss. I will save you—you shall live—or we will die together.'

A pair of slender arms were round the pedlar's neck, and a small, black-haired Undine was sobbing passionately on his shoulder. The actress had been carried away by her part; possibly the actor had been not unimpressed by his. Men sometimes seek strange times and methods for uttering with impunity the secrets that they never otherwise reveal even to themselves. After a moment, the pedlar rose to his feet, unclasping the impulsive arms, and laughing perfunctorily.

'When you make your first appearance before the footlights, young lady,' he said, 'mind you look in the stage box on the left hand side, and there you will see me, red hair and all, with a bouquet as broad as you are long, all ready to throw at you. Ha, ha, ha! Why, that scene of ours would have brought down the house. What a pity there was no one to see it but my donkey!'

The little maiden looked at him through her tears, with a puzzled, and, as it were, defrauded air.

'You must be a sort of fairy yourself,' she said; 'you have seemed to be two or three different things since I met you. Which are you, really?'

'Well, young lady, that's a secret; and it's the safest one in the world, for I don't know the answer to it myself. Good-bye, I must be off.'

'Shall I ever see you again?'

'Not as you have seen me to-day,' replied the pedlar.

He climbed over the stile, harnessed up his donkey, and was out of sight before Madeleine discovered that he had left 'Undine' behind him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Describes two English country-seats, their character and contents: with some incidental reflections on the mutual relations of society and the individual.

THOSE who have laboured, not only in the heat of the day, but throughout the cool of the night likewise, during the London season, are wont to affect country neighbourhoods from August to November. Many great folks who are at home in Mayfair in the earlier part of the year have their real homes some hundreds of miles from that renowned region. Lord Castlemere, after the progress of years and failing health had diminished his joy in social activities, became very fond of his Devonshire place, and used to improve early opportunities of repairing thither, and then to invent pretexts for remaining late. The castle—as it was called, although scarcely so large as to warrant that lofty title—was a fine old stone-built pile, with windows banked in with ivy, and an aspect of hale and venerable permanence, as if nature had agreed to take it into partnership, and had confided to it some secret of her immortality. Nor was this impression checked by the fact that a good part of the edifice was frankly in ruins. The northern side, owing to some cause now forgotten in the obscurity of ages, had received a severe mauling, which no attempt had been made to repair. A large oak, that could not have been less than two hundred years old, grew up in the centre of one of the rooms of this part, and filled it brimful of majestic greenery. The jagged fractures of the walls had also been sweetened by soft vegetation; and families of birds, whose beginning dated back beyond the memory of man, built their perennial nests in secret crevices and hollows. But all this grand and picturesque decay only seemed to fortify the serene vitality of the habitable portion; it was as the link binding the work of human hands to the bosom of the mother earth, through which the pulse of life might flow. In beholding the meditative windowed front of the dwelling, standing firm upon its broad terrace, with steps and grey balustrade of massive stone, you felt the strength which human works attain only by the confession of their human limitations.

The ruined fragment served to protect the remainder from the sweep of the northern and easterly blasts; it fronted the sea, though a mile or so of lower land intervened between it and the shore. From the castle tower there was a steep descent of a hundred and fifty feet to the turf at the foot of the precipice on which the tower was built. Up to the verge of the descent the land sloped gradually from the south, and here the body of the building had its site and pursued its peaceful avocations; the warlike tower being uplifted as a shield and menace against hostilities from beyond. Through the meadow below the cliff a brawling stream hurried seaward to affront the shore. Further off, the sea mounted like a wall to the smooth sweep of the

horizon line; and away to the right might be discerned the roofs and masted harbour of a town.

All this was no doubt more taking to the outward eye than the trim and brick-bound conventionality of the London mansion; and when, having strolled about the place and viewed its various aspects, and trodden ankle-deep in the mossy elasticity of the shaven lawn, and admired the ancient flower-garden, with its marigolds, sunflowers, and hollyhocks, you passed under the broad arched portal and into the house, you found nothing there to disenchant your expectations. The hall and the main rooms were large and lofty, but they had a more comfortable and familiar air than is the case in most of these old places; and they were furnished and ornamented in a way which suggested the operation of the heart rather than the head; that is, there was no severe and bloodless decorative purpose carried out, but each wall and corner, each alcove and fireplace, bore the mark of affectionate eyes and thoughts. In every object and in the disposition of it was shown a living interest or gentle memory; imparting to the whole a tender and mellow harmony sought for in vain by our scientific Nosottis and æsthetic Morrises. Lord Castlemere, in fact, whenever he thought of himself as an inhabitant of this planet, in distinction from his abstract philosophic individuality, always saw himself dwelling in these rooms, wandering in these pleasaunces, and recognising in each thing that met his sight some keepsake or illustration of his inward or outward existence. This was his home: elsewhere he was more or less abroad: and here he had hoped to die.

Miss Vivian was not, perhaps, so much in love with the castle as her brother had been. She was a lady whose early impressions had been gathered in a whist-playing world, and who had combined or alternated this amusement and others kindred to it with a private and independent bias towards religious exercises. These pursuits were more reconcilable in practice than in theory; some murderers and forgers have been very pious people in their leisure moments; but what Miss Vivian felt was really necessary to the indulgence of both was plenty of society. When she sorted her cards and won her points, she wished to do so in a house full of fashionable and reputable people similarly employed; and when she appealed to Heaven to overlook her transgressions and to number her among its saints, she desired to have the visible assurance that the majority of her mortal acquaintances were compromising themselves in the same way. This was very practicable in London, but not in an outlying corner of Devonshire. Brighton was better; and the Continent offered several available localities. Accordingly, Miss Vivian, when her brother had turned his annual back on London, and set face westward, usually had made some excuse for not accompanying him; and Lord Castlemere seldom offering any very strenuous persuasions, a temporary separation would be effected; the lady going to Brighton or Paris, or sometimes to Rome, with her prayer-book, her cards, and her spaniel;

while his lordship and Madeleine betook themselves to the castle. Then, in the little season, they would reassemble in London once more, all the better friends for the change. This had been the order of affairs for several years past; but now that Castlemere had got beyond the influence of the London world, and that of Devonshire as well, it occurred to Miss Vivian, who was a real great lady in spite of her peculiarities, that courtesy to his memory required her to do as he would have done had he been alive. She therefore intimated to Madeleine that they would this autumn go down to Devonshire, instead of to Paris, as had been her previous intention. Madeleine acquiesced in the arrangement, though perhaps it did not altogether gratify her. She had a curiosity to see the Paris of her early childhood, now a dream to her, but a dream that every year lost a shadow and gained a light. The little heiress had herself a strong social instinct. However, she fancied she could manage well enough at the castle for one year more, and was encouraged in this hope by the assurance that the Maurices would be there as usual.

The Maurices, for her, meant Mrs. Roland; though society in general did not share her opinion in this respect. The Maurices were old Lady Maurice, and her son Sir Stanhope. They lived in the estate next adjoining the Castlemeres, but as different from it as a shop sign is different from a tombstone. I do not mean to insinuate by this that the Maurices were new rich people, with a tradesman for their grandfather. They were as well off for ancestors as most of us; but Sir Stanhope Maurice was a young gentleman of advanced Radical views; and being also possessed with a juvenile mania for consistency, he found happiness in having everything about him according to the latest modern notions. His country-seat, which had had pretensions to antiquity and picturesqueness, had been severely squared off and straightened up, until inconvenience and charm had disappeared before bald ugliness and salubrity. Light, ventilation, drainage, and all manner of sanitary improvements were insisted upon with unrelenting zeal; the roof was slated, the chimneys were untwisted, and the entire building was stuccoed and painted from eaves to basement. As for the grounds, they were laid out in a manner to give pleasure to any one of a correct and geometrical turn of mind. The shade trees which had stood near the house (and had stood there since the time of James the First) were cut down, in order to obviate damp and promote a freer circulation of air. Inside, the house was as arid, as airy, and as light as a deal box with the sides cut out. The walls of the rooms were hard-finished in pale grey and pale green, and no pictures hung on them, because a dwelling-house ought not to be made into a museum. The floors were polished, and had mattings instead of carpets, because the latter collected dust. No room contained anything in the way of furniture except tables, chairs, and here and there a book cabinet, and a sideboard in the dining-room; because anything beyond these would have served no practical purpose. There were no heavy curtains to the windows,

windows being made for the purpose of admitting light. In short, the house was outraged until it was precisely what its young master desired it to be. I will not say that its swept and garnished condition actually presented an image of Sir Stanhope's mind; but it presented an image of the mind he thought he had, or believed he ought to have. He was a bloodthirsty utilitarian; and there is nothing so well calculated to empty a man's head of cobwebs, and of everything else, as youthful utilitarianism. It scours out the interior of his skull, even when it fails to impart a corresponding polish to the exterior man.

However, he was less empty than he flattered himself was the case. The mind of an honest and generous-souled young baronet may differ from his house in this respect, that whereas the latter cannot help itself, the former cannot help helping itself; as it goes on and meets the world, a current of furniture and decoration inevitably sets in, and fills the bare spaces with things which shake utilitarianism on its throne. Sir Stanhope Maurice was twenty-two years old, rather short, rather plump, with a head very erect, a dignified semi-military carriage of the shoulders; well-shaped legs, the knees of which seemed to straighten themselves with a virtuous resolution to emulate the rigidity of their owner's principles; short, high-arched feet, which turned very much out as the baronet paced over his mattings; warm, firm little hands, with short-pointed fingers; a face in which an innate cordiality of disposition strove with a premature gravity and a conviction of vast experience; soft brown hair, thin on the top of the head; a small, unprominent nose, and a firm, well-moulded chin; these, with a fresh and ruddy complexion, were the chief features of Sir Stanhope's personal appearance. His temper was sweet, but, like many sweet tempers, short; he was of an argumentative and expository turn of mind; and though charitable to the core as soon as he forgot himself, he would be portentously severe against very trifling shortcomings as long as he could restrict himself to the intellectual plane. His notions of honour, of justice, of propriety, of duty, were elevated and sensitive to a rather difficult degree. He was a hot partisan of his friends, and an uncompromising denouncer of his foes; yet he was not to be charged with partiality, because (as he could demonstrate to you in a moment) his friends were always in the right, and his enemies always in the wrong. A great part of the time he overflowed with jocundity, though he was neither a wit nor a humorist; but he had his sober and silent hours, and occasionally he would sink into rayless abysses of despondency, in which he seemed to be contending with some almost intolerable sense of injustice. He became saturnine, and was not to be modified or comforted, until his spirits rebelled of themselves, and compelled him to find some pretext for being good-humoured again.

Sir Stanhope Maurice resembled other good men in having a weak point; and the weak point in his case was Lady Maurice. The old lady had a countenance and a nature as grand, serene, and kindly as

an autumnal landscape. Her life had been both a wide and a deep one; she had experienced much and had thought more. Her husband had been taken from her soon after Stanhope's birth; she had been forced to endure many anxieties, and to struggle against many difficulties; and she had come through her life with an increased love of human beings, and a delight in observing them as they passed before her arm-chair that was at once unaffectedly charitable and archly humorous. There was a spice of Irish blood in Lady Maurice, that gave richness and elasticity to her mind. Her influence upon Stanhope was so great—so much greater than he had any idea of—that she was very chary of exerting it, and would only do so in extreme predicaments. She had allowed him to make a painted bandbox of their fine old house without a murmur; she had listened to the exposition of all his opinions, and had agreed with him whenever she possibly could; she had sympathised with him in his indignations, and smiled with him in his merriment; in a word, she had recognised the fact that man's convictions are the things of a day, but that for that day they are the breath of his life, and that so long as they are honestly come by they had better be left to correct themselves. But she had been wise enough to see that she could add to his happiness as well as increase her own comfort by opposing him in one particular.

'You know, Stanhope,' she said, 'that I am an old woman, and too much wedded to my habits to let my practice correspond with my theories quite so completely as you can do. I want you to let me arrange my own chamber and boudoir in the old unsanitary way that I've been used to. Will you?'

'My dearest mother,' replied Sir Stanhope, with a fine impulse of magnanimity, 'of course you shall do exactly as you like best. You may carpet your room with feather-beds and hang it with cobwebs, if you please, and I will only take care that you have the best cobwebs and feather-beds procurable. At the same time,' he added, constrained by a conscientious pang, 'I can't say that I think you will stick to the old method long; you will be too clear-sighted not to perceive the advantages of my plan. And I could demonstrate to you——'

'Dear boy, that is just what I want,' interposed his mother, smiling in her deceitful heart. 'I want you often to come into my boudoir, and let me hear your arguments.'

'I'm afraid you won't stay in your present mind long, then,' rejoined Stanhope, conscious of the strength of a giant, but remembering that it was tyrannous to use it as a giant. Lady Maurice looked feminine and maternal, but said nothing. She put down a thick, warm carpet, that fitted snug to the walls. She draped a pair of rich damask curtains over the window, and placed a pot of soft crimson azaleas on the sill. In the alcove opposite the window she set up a bookcase of her favourite books. In a corner was a what-not, filled with quaint china and curiosities. On the mantelpiece were an old clock, with an engraved brass face, and two Japanese copper jars,

enamelled with grotesque figures in flower-like colours. The walls were wainscoted to within a yard of the ceiling; polished brass candle-sconces were affixed to the dark wood on either side the broad and roomy fireplace, within which glowed and crackled the fragments of the ancestral trees; it being characteristic of Lady Maurice's philosophy, since she could no longer get shade and coolness out of her timber, to get light and warmth from it. Finally—not to make too long an enumeration of these cosy delights—two indefensibly luxurious easy-chairs extended their hospitable arms beside the hearth, in one of which sat the venerable hostess, while the other lay in wait for the ingenuous and unsuspecting Stanhope.

One afternoon he came in. He could only stay a few minutes, he explained, because he must be over at the stables by four o'clock, to see about ventilating the floors. He cast a glance about the room, and, having previously determined to shake his head mislikingly, did so. He dropped into the vacant easy-chair (there happened to be no other available seat of any kind in the boudoir), stretched his feet towards the fender, as he could not well avoid doing, and began to make a few criticisms. A chair of this kind was injurious to the chest and to the internal organs. Of course it was comfortable for the moment, but that was not the point. This thick carpet, agreeable though it was to the feet, would in the long run produce a deplorable effect upon the lungs. This subdued light, and the dark tone of everything, must militate against any work that made a demand upon the eyes.

'I only do my netting, dear, and listen to you talk, and those I can do with my eyes shut,' interposed Lady Maurice at this point, and without the least symptom of a double meaning.

'But you read, you know,' objected Stanhope.

'Ah, I know all my old books by heart,' said her ladyship, with a smile and a sigh; 'not that I dispute your judgment, dear.'

'Oh, I don't set up to be infallible,' Stanhope declared generously. 'No doubt,' he added, with an access of candour, 'old-fashioned appliances of this kind have their attractions, and even, within certain limits, their merits. But one must learn to look beneath the first appearance of things; and when you are as old as I am, mother—I mean—I mean when you've given as much thought to these subjects as I have—Now, for instance, that old Venetian decanter on the little stand beside your elbow. It's a pretty thing enough, I suppose, so far as that is concerned; but what use does it serve? It holds nothing; it——'

'By the bye, that reminds me!' murmured Lady Maurice, as if to herself. 'Stanhope, my dear, I know you have a very correct palate. There's some kind of *liqueur* in that decanter, and I want you, if you don't mind, to tell me what it is. I can't decide myself. I suppose you won't condescend to taste it; but I dare say you can tell just as readily by the aroma. Here—try!'

Sir Stanhope took the delicate flask in his hand and sniffed. He

paused a moment meditatively, then sniffed once more. Humph! It smelt rather like Benedictine, but—sniff!—it was difficult to be certain about these *liqueurs*. They were very different from liquors, you know. Hum! Perhaps it would be safer to taste a thimbleful; was there a very small glass—ah! that would do. Now let us see. Yes—no—yes, though! It was Benedictine after all. Not a bad kind either. Try once more. Yes, there could be no doubt about it.

'I'm very much obliged to you, dear,' said the mother. 'I thought perhaps it might be. But now, go on with what you were saying. That is, unless you must go over to the stables at once?'

Stanhope would stay a little longer. The firelight contrasted with the dark woodwork had a pretty effect. The chair was more like a sofa than a chair. The window-curtains made it seem almost like evening. There were some things he wished particularly to say—some arguments. He lay back and folded his hands composedly, and said first one thing and then another. After a while, Lady Maurice was reminded of an anecdote of her younger days, and told it with her usual charm of voice and manner. The conversation took another turn—not utilitarian. Half an hour passed; Stanhope only settled himself more comfortably in his chair. The afternoon slipped away; he was still there, and was now renewing his exposition of the evils of indulging in things that merely gratified one's love of indolence. By the time the dinner-bell rang he had almost convinced his mother; but the visit to the stable—well, that could be done as well to-morrow. The next day he did not come, or only just to look in and out again. The day after he came immediately after dinner and remained till bed-time, making out a clear case against the boudoir. Why make a longer story of it? Insensibly, Sir Stanhope got into the habit of spending all his leisure time in the only part of the house that he did not approve of. Lady Maurice lured him on; surely a near relative of hers must have kissed the Blarney stone. Under cover of vindicating his principles, the young baronet daily suspended them; and his mother, by her gentle but lingering intractability, helped him to close his eyes to the truth. He wreaked his energies in rendering the rest of the house uninhabitable, and was so gratified at his mother's failure to dispute his logic that he overlooked his own failure to discard her easy-chairs. No compromise could have been more felicitous.

These events were happening at about the time that Sir Stanhope's university career was drawing to a close. The family had previously lived in town; but the young baronet had set his heart (or, rather, his mind) on being a model country gentleman, living on his acres, educating his tenants, and going up to London only occasionally. At the university he had distinguished himself, having taken a first class, and proved his ability to make a finely argued speech in debate. He was spoken of as likely to do himself credit one of these days in the House of Commons. For many years the Maurices had been on terms of intimacy with the Castlemeres, Lady Maurice having known

Lord Castlemere in his youth. When Madeleine took her place as the hope of the Castlemere line, the idea of making a match between her and Stanhope was implicitly present to the minds of the elders on both sides. It was a suitable match from a social point of view, as well as desirable on personal grounds. The children would have large fortunes; the estates were contiguous; in character and disposition they were, if not directly sympathetic, at all events the complements of each other. Madeleine needed a steady and logical spirit like Stanhope's to restrain her independence and audacity. Stanhope would not be the worse for a touch of Madeleine's originality and fire. Nevertheless, no definite agreement was entered into; and when, during the last year or so, Lord Castlemere had got his mind fixed upon the possibility of there being a son of his in existence, his anticipations regarding Madeleine took another turn, as to which he did not take counsel with Lady Maurice.

But now that Castlemere was gone, her ladyship had to act upon her own judgment, and she thought it best to make some suggestions to Stanhope, in order to discover what attitude he was likely to take up. He said that he had not as yet taken the question of marriage into his calculations; but that of course he would expect to marry some day; and when the day came it was as likely that he would choose Madeleine as anybody. Meanwhile he would endeavour to think of her from the matrimonial point of view. Of course Miss Vivian and the Clanroys had already been spoken to, and had made no sort of objection to the project. But within the last two or three months the rumours as to a rival claimant to the Castlemere property had been gaining currency; and although not much weight was attached to them, they could not fail to put Madeleine's attractions as a marriageable object in a new light. The practical result was to make Lady Maurice willing to postpone clinching any bargain until Madeleine had grown a little older. In seven or eight years she would reach the age at which the existing will gave her irrevocable possession of the inheritance, and then would be the moment to decide. While saying this to herself, however, Lady Maurice was conscious of a certain lack of graciousness and generosity in her position. The custom of buying and selling flesh and blood was one in which she had been educated, but it did not come to her by nature. The dilemma was as follows: If no attempt was made to attach Madeleine until she was eighteen years old, for fear she should turn out not to be the heiress, the danger would have to be faced of her falling in love in some other direction. On the other hand, if she were drawn on to love Stanhope, and was afterwards jilted because she had no money—it would look badly, to say the least of it. What was to be done? The more Lady Maurice considered the matter, the less was she able to make up her mind; and the result was that she did nothing—except allow things to take their course. In other words, she trusted to luck. Madeleine had of course not yet been informed of the honour that contingently awaited her; and though she liked

Lady Maurice better than either of her aunts, and appreciated Stanhope very well as a comrade, she was not likely to break her heart or compromise her self-respect for some time to come.

As for Stanhope, he was not asked to share his mother's anxieties. His ideas about marriage were Radical; and being uncertain what that might import, his mother thought it prudent not to open the question with him. In this decision she was opposed by Mrs. Roland, who, indeed, frankly expressed her disapproval of the business from beginning to end. Kate Roland had always been frank and intrepid, and in her presence humbug looked small, and selfishness mean, be their attire and credentials what they might. Kate was Lady Maurice's niece—the daughter of Rear-Admiral Harvey Kavanagh; and since the last two years she had been left an orphan and had lived with her aunt and cousin; but she had a sufficient income of her own, and was under obligations to nobody. She was a fresh-hued, fresh-spirited woman of twenty; but you soon perceived that she was in some way different from other young women of similar general type; and if you had insight enough, you would also divine that this difference depended not so much upon congenital traits as upon some exceptional experience through which she had passed. Such at any rate was the fact, but few people could have guessed the nature of that experience. It was something in one aspect so hackneyed that I hesitate to record it, lest its terrible reality should fail to make itself felt. It was one of those events which those who hear of them are prone to regard from the romantic or sensational point of view, forgetting how stark a tragedy it is to the sufferer. Kate Kavanagh was betrothed to a gallant young lieutenant in the navy, a man whom she loved with her whole heart and soul, and who loved her no less. One day they were married, and never was there a gayer or more prosperous wedding. The lieutenant had leave for three months, and at the church door they got into their carriage to be driven to the railway station. On the way thither there was a collision; Kate's husband was killed and terribly mangled; no one else received even a scratch. The bride had the body put into a cab and drove with it in her arms back to her father's house. That was the end of her honeymoon. No one saw her again for many months.

She spoke freely of 'my husband' afterwards, but never alluded to his death. She was as gay in manner as before, as bright in talk; she laughed as often, though not so long. But in her voice was a tone which had not been in it until she said to her father, 'I have brought my husband home.' And there was a line at either corner of her sanguine mouth such as no young woman ought to have. It was as if she stood bravely mirthful on the threshold of a chamber within which lay the bleeding body of all she loved. Sometimes, in the midst of conversation, she would abruptly cease speaking, arise, and go out. Then it might be known that she had entered her chamber of death and shut the door. The atmosphere of that chamber invested her as with a sacred invisible garment, which at

once gave her liberty to speak and deal with her friends with a freedom and directness that no other woman of her age and condition could use, and at the same time removed her from really intimate approach. She was the friend of many men, both young and old; her attitude towards them was not that of a sister, scarcely that of a woman, but still less that of a man. It was something unique; it brought out what was finest and worthiest in them; it would have made a boor gentlemanly and chivalrous for the time being; it gave him who was a gentleman already a new conception of the possibilities of human society. Grandiloquent, conventional, or pharisaical people were panic-stricken and silenced by Kate Roland's laughing glance and question; they smiled feebly, and replied with thin uncertainty of tone. It was the warmth of human fellowship in her that froze them. Many women may have envied Kate the explicit devotion which the men who were her friends displayed towards her; but not many of them would or could have paid her fatal price for it.

Such as she was, Kate did not approve of the diplomatic attitude which was being held towards Madeleine Vivian, and she said as much to Lady Maurice with her usual frankness. 'I should hope Stanhope had money enough for two, if it came to that,' she remarked.

'You are perfectly right, Kate,' Lady Maurice replied, 'but this is one of those things that cannot be settled according to abstract rules of right and wrong.'

'Yes? Why not?'

'Because it is a social question; and society's right and wrong are custom. We live in society, we avail ourselves of its advantages, and in return we are bound to conform to its habits. If we take higher ground in one thing, we should take it in all, and retire to the wilderness. It is not the custom for a rich person to marry a poor one, and experience shows that such marriages seldom turn out well. At the same time it would be nice to have the children marry if it can be done.'

'Then I'll tell you what I should do,' said Kate, in her quick light way; 'I should get Madeleine and put her in that chair, and I should get Stanhope and put him in that, and I should say, "Now, Stanhope, you're to marry Madeleine if she gets the money, and not if she doesn't." Then it would be all fair and above-board, in spite of society. Well? Shall we do that?'

'Of course not, my dear; it would be the end of the whole thing.'

'Would it? Why would it?'

'You ask me, but you know as well as I do. The children are human beings; you can't manage them as you would machines; if they think they are being bargained about, they would be up in arms in a moment. We must let them take higher ground——'

As soon as that unlucky phrase had passed her lips, Lady Maurice knew that she was lost, so far as argument was concerned; and

therein she judged her antagonist rightly. Kate launched out at her and spared her nothing. Yet it may be doubted whether she would have been so merciless had she believed that Lady Maurice, when it came to the point, would have behaved anything like so wickedly as she gave herself credit for. 'If Stanhope came to you,' she said at last, 'and told you that—thanks to your machinations and his—Madeleine was in love with him, but he wouldn't marry her because she had lost her cheque-book: if he told you that, Lady Maurice, you would disown him on the spot, and forbid him ever to show his face in your presence again!'

Lady Maurice protested, but secretly thought it not impossible.

CHAPTER XIX.

In which Kate Roland remarks that the people one understands at a glance are the safest, but not always the most entertaining.

On the morning after the day on which the Homeric contest took place, a detailed description of which was furnished two or three chapters back, Sir Stanhope Maurice came into his mother's boudoir with a letter in his hand.

'It's like coming into a cave—this room,' he said, in a plaintive tone. 'How do you contrive to live without light?'

'It's very good of you to let us see you here,' Lady Maurice declared. 'Now you are here, don't you think you might sit down just for a few minutes?'

'If you like I'll get you a cane-bottomed chair and put it by the window,' added Kate Roland, who was present; 'and we'll talk about the Sahara Desert and whitewash—shall we?'

'Are there any news?' Lady Maurice hastened to say; for she was always in fear lest her son should divine the significance of Kate Roland's chaff. 'I see you have a letter.'

'It's from whom do you think? Bryan, of all people in the world!'

'Dear me! I thought he had gone to Australia, or America, or somewhere.'

'He has got back, and he will come here this afternoon. There's a man I should like you to know, Kate. He's a man you would kn w how to appreciate.'

o'I should like to know him. Tell me about him. Who is he—what is he?'

'I should have thought I must have spoken of him before now. He was at Christ Church with me—the year ahead of me. Everybody was talking of him. He could do anything; he did do everything he tried his hand at. You should have seen him in a row with the

town! At cricket once I saw him take the middle stump four times running. They tried him in the eight, but it wouldn't do; they couldn't get any one to balance him; but he won the sculls whenever he entered. He drove the prettiest tandem in the university. As for reading, there never was such a fellow. He was first man of his year; nobody knew how he did it; he seemed able to get on any length of time without sleep; they say he sported his oak once five consecutive days and nights before an exam., and came out as fresh——'

'Oh, you may as well stop,' interrupted Mrs. Roland. 'I don't care to hear about prodigies and monsters. If you've a man to tell me about, I shan't mind listening. Meantime, since you won't have the cane-bottomed chair, you had better sit in the easy, and try and make believe you're comfortable—so as not to hurt our feelings! Well now? What sort of a looking man is this? If he's an Apollo, you can just mention it, and pass on to something else. I generally prefer my men ugly.'

'He's not effeminately lovely, at all events, is he, mother?' said Stanhope, shutting his lips and laughing. 'His hair may be of the Apollo colour for what I know.'

'He has perfectly red hair,' said Lady Maurice; 'and he looks a good deal like Rob Roy, I should fancy. But he is such a good fellow that you don't mind that, except just at first.'

'Well? And what good has he done?' continued Kate.

'He has been scandalously treated by his father!' said Stanhope, indignantly. 'His father is one of the richest men in the north of England. Bryan is a good-hearted, impulsive fellow—never knew how to look after his own interests; but you can't expect a man with a physique and spirits like his to behave like a church deacon. His father got it into his head that Bryan was fast—perfect nonsense! The only difference between him and other fellows was that he always got pounced upon if anything happened; he never knew how to make excuses and sneak out of the way. There were hundreds of worse fellows than he, without half his temptations.'

'And what did his father do? Cut off his supplies?'

'He followed him up like a detective. I should like to know what you are laughing at?'

'You are too bad, Kate,' said Lady Maurice, in an undertone.

'I'm not doing anything!' returned Mrs. Roland, laughing out. I was only wondering if your friend Bryan was as indignant about it as Stanhope is. No, don't be angry with me, my dear fellow. I'm like Bryan—I can't behave like a church deacon. Well? Did they catch him in any scrape?'

'Of course, if a man becomes the object of a conspiracy, it will always be possible to "catch" him, as you call it, in something. I don't know what it was; I never asked. When I give my confidence to any one, I don't trouble myself any more about what other people may suspect them of. Bryan's father never understood him, or made any allowances for him. I am as strong an advocate of legitimate

authority as anybody; but there are things to which no one with a proper feeling of self-respect can allow himself to submit. All I can say is, that his father heard and believed some absurd rumour or other about Bryan's goings-on, and told him that his inheritance depended upon his reforming and marrying his cousin. It was the most tyrannical affair I ever heard of.'

'Who told you? Bryan's father?'

'I never saw Bryan's father, and I never wish to. Bryan told me that himself. I suppose you are going to say that is suspicious testimony. Well, you don't know the man. He is as incapable of misrepresenting the truth as any man living. He was much more inclined to blame himself than his father; and he did all he could to satisfy him.'

'Married his cousin? Did he do that?'

'He might have done it, so far as he was concerned. He had been engaged to her before this trouble began, and probably thought much more highly of her than she deserved. But before he had left the university three months, the engagement was broken off.'

'Broken off? By whom? The gentleman or the lady?'

'It was broken off: that was enough for me. Of course, Bryan, as a man of honour, couldn't be expected to say whether the break came from his side or hers.'

'I don't see that,' said Kate, lifting up her face quickly, and pushing back some light strands of hair from her forehead. 'I don't see that! He might not wish to tell—that I can understand; he would naturally be ashamed to confess that he had broken his word to her, or he might not like to be asked why she had given up him; but I don't see how his honour would be involved either way.'

'My dear Kate,' said Lady Maurice, in her demure friendly tones, 'don't you think you are making your heart rather unnecessarily hard against this poor friend of ours?'

'Not at all!' she answered with her usual rapidity. 'Stanhope is making out his friend to be a martyr, and every one else concerned to be monsters. I don't believe in either monsters or martyrs, except upon pretty clear evidence. But I am ready to be convinced—longing to be! Come, Stanhope—mustn't be cross, you know. How is it about honour?'

Stanhope laughed in the manly, restrained way proper to one whose equanimity is not to be upset by the sallies of feminine vivaciousness. As a matter of fact, Kate's criticism had somewhat disconcerted him for the moment, and he was under obligations to his mother for procuring him time to consider how he should reply to it. 'What I meant,' he said good-humouredly, 'was this—that it being plainly to Bryan's advantage pecuniarily that he should marry his cousin, if he nevertheless found it necessary to break off the engagement, he must have done so for some reason which it would throw discredit upon her to disclose; and if she broke it off, it must have been from a malicious wish to aid his father in getting him into trouble; and

honour would forbid his saying what would lay her open to such an accusation. All that an honourable man could do in such circumstances was to hold his tongue; and that is what Bryan did.'

'Well, Sir Charles Grandison, supposing your friend to have been entirely innocent, that is satisfactory. So his father and his *fiancée* conspired together to make a beggar of him? And what becomes of the money that ought to have been his?'

'I don't know,' said Stanhope indifferently, crossing one leg over the other and swinging his foot. 'Bryan has an allowance of about two hundred a year for the present, I believe. I'm not holding him up as a pattern of perfection, Kate. I believe he's his own worst enemy; the sort of fellow who is capable of sacrificing his own best interests for a whim or a punctilio that most people might consider foolish; and I dare say he may have done reckless things that a cold-blooded curmudgeon would have kept clear of. But there never was anything mean or underhand about him. He was like a great ingenuous boy in many ways; he would blurt out things about himself that he would never have mentioned if he'd had a particle of self-conceit or hypocrisy in him. Anybody could deceive him, but he never deceived anybody. However, I shall say nothing more about him; you can judge for yourself this afternoon. He's been away from England for nearly two years. His adventures ought to be worth hearing. Well, I must go and see about getting that timber sawn up,' concluded Sir Stanhope, extracting himself with no especial alacrity from the luxurious depths of his chair.

When he had gone out, Kate Roland took up her work from her lap, on which she had laid it down at his entrance, and remarked, 'What a dear old fellow he is! Fancy having any one stand up for you like that after you had been away two years!'

'Stanhope has a combative instinct; he is apt to defend any one who is attacked,' Stanhope's mother replied. 'I never heard so much about Bryan until now.'

'I didn't attack; it was the total depravity of the father that I objected to. You have seen the son, haven't you?'

'Yes; once or twice. I thought him very droll and pleasant. He has the sort of charm that ugly men sometimes do have—the air of not being conscious of themselves. He entered into things with a kind of fury that one likes to see; we are all so quiet and uninterested nowadays. I should think he would be a man whom women would be very apt to like. His voice, I remember, had a quite peculiar quality in it; it was a very strong voice, and seemed to resound, and yet he managed it so completely that it was no louder than yours or mine, and always touched just the note he wished. But there was something more in it than that, else I shouldn't have recollected it after so long a time; it always gave one a pleasant surprise; it was entirely characteristic of him, and yet you felt that he wouldn't have been half what he was if it had been different, or if he had not spoken. All that makes me think that it couldn't have been his cousin who was the one to break the engagement. But I may be wrong.'

'Between you, you have made me very curious to see him,' Kate observed, after a little silence. 'His story doesn't seem to suit him, somehow. It sounds like "Hamlet" with the part omitted. Upon the whole I feel inclined to like him. The people one understands at a glance are the safest, but not generally the most entertaining. You will have him to dinner, I suppose?'

'I think Stanhope will probably want to keep him here for several days,' Lady Maurice said; 'and it will give the poor boy something to do; he really has to invent occupations now that he has got the house into what he considers proper order. I am expecting every week that he will come to the end of this country-gentleman theory of his, and begin to see arguments in favour of a city life. The real place for him is Parliament, after all. But perhaps I shall be out of the way by that time.'

To this suggestion Kate make no rejoinder; but after a while she rose from her chair, went over to Lady Maurice, kissed her twice or thrice on the forehead and cheek, and left the room. She did not appear again till the afternoon.

About three o'clock, looking out of her window in the direction of the castle, she saw approaching at some distance two figures. One of them she recognised immediately as Madeleine. The other was a man whom she had never seen before. He was fashionably attired in a dark morning coat and grey trousers. His gait was firm and easy, each step being planted with a sort of solid elasticity upon the earth, and accompanied by a rocking of the broad shoulders, giving an impression of confident and good-humoured power. One arm swung at his side with a regular and weighty motion; in the other hand he carried a bunch of leaves and grasses which he had apparently been gathering for Madeleine's gratification. As the pair drew nearer, Kate perceived that they were talking together; the man seemed to be regaling the girl with some story, which she occasionally interrupted by a question or a comment. They were evidently on the best of terms with each other; the man laughed once or twice, and regarded her with a sideways inclination of his head. He was of a sunburnt complexion, with short red side-whiskers; his chin and massive throat were close shaven. The face was certainly not a handsome one; but it was effective; it was a face which Kate felt she would not easily forget. She also was aware of a dangerous strength in it—a power of so commanding and monopolising the beholder's attention as to incapacitate him from forming a judgment as to what might be going on behind it. By this time the stranger, with Madeleine beside him, was within thirty or forty yards of the house; and suddenly raising his eyes, his glance met Kate's point-blank. He was talking animatedly to Madeleine at the moment; and without removing his eyes from Kate he continued to talk in the same tone, insomuch that Madeleine, who was absorbed in what he was saying, did not perceive the unexpected direction in which his regards had become fixed. Kate was sensible of an increased warmth in her cheeks; and yet it was with difficulty

that she turned her eyes away and withdrew from her position. When she was once more secure from observation, she found herself perceptibly discomposed.

'That man is not so ingenuous as he will make me believe he is half an hour from now!' was the sum of her reflections upon this little incident. 'He can make me think whatever he wants me to think, while he is talking to me; but afterwards, if I remember this first impression, I shall get the better of him again. Well, now for it!'

In this illiberal and deliberately prejudiced frame of mind, Kate Roland made some alterations in her toilet, and went downstairs to meet Bryan Sinclair.

CHAPTER XX.

In which Bryan confesses that he wants to make the world his own, not to keep, but to throw away.

DINNER in those days, in that particular part of the world, took place at five o'clock. A servant was despatched to the castle, to request the honour of Miss Vivian's presence; and another took a waggon over to the neighbouring town to fetch Mr. Sinclair's portmanteau, its owner having accepted Sir Stanhope's invitation to spend a day or two with him. In the meantime the two gentlemen (after Sinclair had been presented to the ladies) strolled off together on a tour of inspection of the premises; and Madeleine became the companion of Kate Roland, who had conceived a warm affection for the child.

Madeleine was full of talk about her new friend, and gave Kate a dramatic account of her first meeting with him under the hedge the day before. At first he had been a pedlar, and she had been the lady of the manor; but afterwards a magic transformation had taken place, and she had become Undine and he Huldbrand. Then, this morning, while she had been wandering about the park, the enchanter had appeared before her again; this time in the disguise of a gentleman. And he had addressed her by her real name, though she had never told him what it was. And he had said (what proved to be true) that he was an old friend of Sir Stanhope's, though he was not acquainted with Mrs. Roland. And he had related to her a number of very interesting stories; and he and she had partly matured a splendid project, which they meant to accomplish in partnership, but what it was they were at present under mutual bonds not to reveal to any third person. 'And isn't his hair beautiful and red!' said Madeleine thoughtfully, in conclusion.

'Is red hair beautiful?' asked Kate, laughing.

'Once I thought it was not, but now I think it is,' the younger

lady replied, with the gravity of one who has lived to correct the rashness of youthful opinions.

Sinclair and Maurice were all this while loitering about together, turning their eyes upon the various objects which were supposed to be occupying their attention, but in reality seeing things very remote and alien from their actual environment of the moment. 'I didn't expect to find you here,' Sinclair said at length. 'I expected to see you in the House, going in for reform and that sort of thing. Why don't you do it? You are the man to do it.'

'I intend to make the attempt some day,' Maurice answered, folding his hands behind his back with a senatorial air. 'But there is still time to think of that. I want to get acquainted with the people first, and study their mode of life, and show them my idea of how a country gentleman ought to live. These improvements that I have been introducing into my place have been even more for their instruction than for my own convenience.'

'So I should think,' said Sinclair, with a comical contraction of the eyebrows. 'You teach them what to do by teaching them what to avoid. Never mind, my man,' he added, seeing that Maurice was preparing to defend his position; 'you know I always blurt out what's on the end of my tongue. There's a great difference in the way men's tongues are tied on to them. Some are like rudders—the way they move indicates the man's course. Others are like the pennant at the main-top—always on the wag, and nothing comes of it. I could have made a better simile than that if I had had time. How many men do you keep at work about the place? A dozen?'

'Sometimes more—it depends on circumstances. But I have one man who is worth a dozen—you must see him—my foreman. He's as fine a type of the Devonshire yeoman as I know; a good head, and a physique like a Hercules. I fancy he would make short work even of you! Hi! Saunders!' he called to an under-gardener who was working near at hand, 'where's the foreman?'

''A think he be at's cottage, Sir Stanhope,' replied the man, raising himself to an upright position and pulling off his cap. 'But he be rather out o' sorts like.'

'Out of sorts? What do you mean? Is anything the matter with him?'

'Well, Sir Stanhope, he be not in a way to see nobody,' said the man, scratching his head slowly.

'Nonsense!' returned the baronet, displeased that his prize man should be supposed subject to mortal ills. 'Come along, Sinclair. He must be in a bad way if he won't see me. He's a married man,' he continued, as they walked along, 'and his wife is a superior woman for her class in life. A thoroughly steady man too, which is more than can be said of most of them hereabouts. Well, here we are.'

The cottage—an antique, pretty little dwelling, which had not yet suffered from the baronet's regenerative principles—opposed a

shut door to the visitors; but Sir Stanhope, without waiting for an answer to his knock, lifted the latch and entered without ceremony.

The room in which they found themselves, though clean, and neatly furnished with robust oaken furniture, bore symptoms of unwonted disorder. A chair lay with a leg broken in one corner: a looking-glass which hung between the windows had been smashed as by the blow of a fist. Two children were crouching beside the fireplace, evidently in a very dismayed and tearful frame of mind; and their mother not only had an ominously pallid and anxious aspect, but her efforts to present herself in profile to the visitors were unsuccessful in disguising the fact that she was suffering from a black eye. As for the lord and master of the establishment, he was lying in an inelegant position, half on and half off the bed, muttering to himself, in a thick and monotonous tone, a series of imprecations of an impartially condemnatory character.

'What is the meaning of this?' demanded Sir Stanhope, as soon as his astonishment allowed him to speak. 'What have you been doing, Tom Berne? Get up and answer me, sir!'

'You —— go t' hell,' rejoined Tom, with sluggish indifference.

'Oh, pray forgive him, Sir Stanhope,' entreated his wife in a frightened tone. 'Indeed he don't know what he's saying. Oh, be careful, sir!' she added to Sinclair, who had approached the bed; 'he might kill you—oh!'

Sinclair carried a light switch cane in his hand, with a round agate knob at the end of it. Tom Berne was lying with his eyes half closed, still muttering indistinctly to himself, but apparently taking no notice of anything. Sinclair touched him on the temple with the knob of his cane, and said in a low, but distinct tone, 'Get up, Tom Berne, and be civil to your visitors!'

Tom lifted his head, then raised himself on his elbow, and finally sat erect, though swaying a little from side to side; and his eyes stared confusedly about. The manner in which he did it had something unnatural about it, as if he had been acted upon by a galvanic battery, instead of moving by his own volition. The muscles of his mouth, moreover, were relaxed; and this, added to his pallor, gave his face an expression of terror unpleasant to see. 'Who spoke?' said he, after a while.

'I did, Tom,' replied Sinclair. At the same time he removed his hat, and brushed his hand through his hair. The other's wavering glance now rested on him for the first time, and as it did so, the pupils of his eyes dilated. He raised one arm and crouched his head, as one might do who expected to receive a blow.

'There, there—don't be scared, man! Nobody's going to hurt you,' said Sinclair, encouragingly. 'But mind you, Tom Berne! a fellow like you has no business to get drunk. No more of that, do you hear? Look at your wife and children! Do you call yourself a man?'

Tom Berne sat breathing heavily, and his head moved with an

irregular tremor which he was manifestly powerless to control. Suddenly he covered his face with his large rough hands and flung himself down violently on the bed, sobbing with harsh groans. Sinclair put on his hat, and turned to Maurice, who had been looking on at this scene with unaffected amazement.

'He's only a big baby, after all,' he remarked, smiling a little. 'We may as well let him be for the present. He'll make his apologies to-morrow, I dare say. Good-bye, Mrs. Berne.' He passed his arm through Maurice's, and drew him out of the cottage. The latter walked on for some distance like a man whose legs are acting on their private responsibility. Then he stopped and stared at Sinclair up and down.

'There was something ugly about that,' he said in a repugnant tone. 'I'd rather not have seen it. How did you do it, Bryan?'

'It's all in the knob of my cane,' the other replied, with a comical chuckle. 'Either that, or I've got some magnetic power that I understand no more than you do. A drunken man is half a child and half an animal. I saw a good many on my way round the world. They're easier to deal with than one would think, if you go the right way to work.'

'I shouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it,' returned Maurice, shaking his head and walking on again. 'Pah! that isn't my Tom Berne. What can have come to him? He'll never be good for anything again. There's no stuff left in him.'

'On the contrary, he'll be more useful than ever he was before, if you know how to use him,' Sinclair returned. 'A man who'll do whatever he's told without asking questions—Never mind! What a conspicuous object that house of yours is, to be sure! No one can say you've hid your light under a bushel. Does Radicalism mean uprooting trees in your philosophy?'

This question led to an argument which debouched upon politics, and beguiled the arguers away from the subject of Tom Berne, though it did not, perhaps, obliterate him from the unconscious memory of either. Arrived at the house, they separated to dress; and half an hour afterwards the party was seated at the dinner-table. Sinclair sat at Lady Maurice's right hand, and Madeleine at her left; Mrs. Roland was next to Sinclair, and Miss Vivian next to Madeleine; Sir Stanhope presiding at the other end of the table with a mien of particular gravity. 'It's very jolly,' remarked Sinclair, 'to be at an English dinner-table again.'

'Is England the best of all places, then?' Lady Maurice inquired.

'The best things in other places remind me of England,' was the traveller's reply.

'But I suppose this isn't your first dinner since your return?' said Mrs. Roland.

'Bless you, no—if you call eating, dining,' returned Sinclair, looking round at her with his lusty chuckle. 'For the last ten days

or so I've been munching bread and sausage under a wayside hedge, haven't I, Madeleine?'

'You were smoking when I saw you,' that young lady answered, with precise dignity; for she was not insensible of the importance of her position as a member of a real dinner-party. 'You were smoking a cigar. Pedlars ought to smoke pipes.'

'Ay, ay—the cigar was out of character,' Sinclair admitted, nodding to his critic.

'What's this about?' demanded Maurice, raising his eyebrows.

'Only a lark of mine,' said Sinclair; and after sipping his sherry he continued, 'I have always wanted to do it, and at last I got my opportunity. When I landed in London I went to a book shop and bought copies of all the books I had read and taken a liking to. I loaded them on a cart, got a donkey, and off I started. Whenever I met a yokel, or came to a village, I set out my wares, and drove a bargain. I never had better fun. I can tell you, Mrs. Roland, I had no idea of my own gift of the gab until I found myself pointing out the charms of my favourite authors. If what I said were written down, it would make a fine volume of criticism. Then, between times, I had the use of some of the best scenery in England.'

'The use of it? Do you mean you are an artist?' asked Mrs. Roland.

'No; I'm only a late version of the Old Adam. These poor devils of artists always have their canvases on their conscience, and speak of the face of nature with the vocabulary of their paint-box, and think about it by the rules of perspective. I wish there was no name to anything; then we should begin to find out what things are. What is art, do you say, Mrs. Roland?'

'I'd rather hear what you say it is, if you please.'

'Well, I say it's a way of naming things that some man or other had the impudence to invent. This audacious impostor—don't mind the violence of my language, Lady Maurice; I'm hardly out of my corduroys yet—ciphered out a table of proportions and a scale of colours, and evolved a type of what he called ideal beauty. It may be, for what I know, that if the Venus of Milo or the Dresden Madonna were warm, living women, whom you could take round the waist and kiss, and who would kiss you back, or box your ears, they might pass well enough in a crowd. But I say there's no beauty in them as they are; I'd as soon have a stone post, or a scrap of wall-paper. Any wench in the street that can move, and love and hate, and cry and laugh, has more beauty than they, no matter what her face and figure are. The only legitimate artists are actors and actresses—and their assistants, musicians and literary people.'

'You can never persuade me that actors and actresses are artists,' said Miss Vivian, who knew nothing about the Venus or the Madonna, but who did not approve of the way they had been spoken of. 'Any one who is idle and dissolute enough can learn a piece and speak it on the stage.'

Sinclair turned to her with an appearance of enjoying the fun, though his face and voice were serious.

'We are all imitating one another from morning til night,' he said, 'and putting on the style of people more moral, consistent, and sensible than we are; and our object in doing it is to get credit we don't deserve. Now an actor or an actress has no such base motive in his or her impersonations; and they do intelligently and deliberately what the rest of the world does ignorantly and at random. A great actress,' he continued, altering the direction of his glance so as to take in Madeleine, who had forgotten her dinner, and was following his words with sympathetic movements of her own lips and glowing eyes, 'draws the fire and opportunity of ten lifetimes into the compass of one hour, and shows us what we all might be if our blood was always up, and there were no time wasted. That's the kind of artist I'd like to be.'

Madeleine gave a long sigh of intense approval.

'Perhaps you have appeared before the footlights, among your other adventures?' suggested Mrs. Roland.

'I've done some acting, after a fashion,' returned Sinclair, nodding his head. 'But in real life there is great want of a stage-manager; and you're apt to miss your cues and bungle your points. While I was going round the world I saw a great many fine dramatic chances spoiled.'

'Why did you go round the world, Mr. Sinclair?' Lady Maurice inquired, smiling.

'The end and cause of all motion is the hope of bettering ourselves; when we are at our best, and know it, we shall sit still like Brahma. They made it too hot, or too cold, for me in England. But a shorter trip might have done as well. Paris is as good a foreign place as any.'

'I have been in Paris,' observed Madeleine, to the futile distress of her aunt; 'I used to live there when papa had me. Next year I mean to go there again.'

'Yes,' said Sinclair, chuckling quietly and shaking his shoulders, 'Paris was very jolly. I met some nice people there, and heard some curious things. I remember an old lady there called Madame Samoire. She had once been a celebrity in the new philosophic world, and cultivated all sorts of heretical opinions about society and religion. But some dozen or fifteen years ago they got her into trouble. She was left in charge of a niece of hers, a very pretty girl, and saw no harm in letting her make the acquaintance of a young Englishman, who had captivated her heart—Madame Samoire's I mean—by talking communism with her. But one day she woke up and found that the young Englishman had disappeared, and so had the niece. That cured her of the new philosophy. She is a strict Roman Catholic and monarchist now.'

Miss Vivian was a rather keen-witted old personage, and something in this anecdote, or in the way Sinclair glanced at her while

telling it, made her feel uneasy. She had never heard of a Madame Samoire that she could remember; nevertheless she suspected something.

'A good many English people are to be found in Paris, Mr. Sinclair, who have good reasons for not living in England,' she remarked.

'So there are,' Sinclair admitted genially. 'I knew a fellow there—a younger son of Lord Somebody-or-other—who made some unpleasant mistake here, and was packed out of the country to live on an allowance. He married a French girl—not one of the nobility, I believe—and had a child, whom the family at home consented to take off his hands. That fellow was always plotting how he might get his hands on the property through his child. He was very amusing.'

'Wasn't the property entailed?' inquired Sir Stanhope.

'The elder brother had no children—so far as was known; and the gist of the plot lay in getting my friend's child into the missing heir's place. If I had been making up a story, Miss Vivian, I should have identified that elder brother with the young Englishman who ran away with the French girl, which would make the ramifications of the plot much more intricate and interesting—wouldn't it?'

'I know nothing about it, Mr. Sinclair,' replied the old lady steadily; 'and if you'll permit me to say so, I think the less young people hear of that kind of stories the better.'

'Oh! I should be very sorry to interfere with the well-being of any young people,' rejoined Sinclair, bestowing upon Miss Vivian a look of cordial good-nature; though Kate Roland, who glanced at his face a moment afterwards, fancied she detected in it an expression of roguish intelligence which puzzled her.

Whatever may have been the meaning of it, the conversation lost its spontaneous character from this point, and hobbled along in the discontinuous, dot-and-go-one fashion that conversations sometimes affect; and nothing important was struck out up to the time of the ladies' retirement. Then Sir Stanhope, taking a decanter of wine in each hand, came and took his place at the end of the table where Sinclair was sitting.

'You don't drink anything,' said he. 'Port or claret?'

'I can take my three bottles upon occasion,' the other replied, filling his glass. 'But such occasions don't come every day. Drunkenness is not pleasant—in one's self. Mrs. Roland is a clever woman.'

'She's one of the best women above ground,' said Maurice, emphatically.

'When a man thinks that, he generally contemplates something more.'

'Oh, she's not a marrying woman, and I'm not a marrying man, as far as that goes.'

'If you mean to set an example of the virtues to your vassals, you ought to count in matrimony.'

Maurice emptied his glass gravely. 'I shan't count in it yet awhile,'

said he. 'My mother has a scheme of uniting my fortunes to those of that black-haired little heiress, I believe. But that is seven years off, at the least. It's absurd to talk about such a remote possibility.'

'There's no doubt about her being an heiress, is there?' demanded Sinclair, apparently smothering a yawn.

'Oh, no. At least I don't know of any. Lord Castlemere's will was read. Now I think of it, there was some talk about some other claim; but it appears to have come to nothing.'

'Her father will expect a share, I suppose—if she has a father living'

'He's been bought off, as I understand. But tell me about yourself, old fellow. Your travels have made you reticent. How about your concerns at home?'

'I am under obligations to my parent. The *causa teterrima belli* has married some other fellow. If the poor devil were here, I would embrace him and drink his health.'

'Come, Sinclair! You don't expect me to believe that you are glad to have lost fifteen thousand a year—I say nothing about the lady. I'm afraid you are hard hit.'

'So I am, to the world in general. But to you I have no secrets. Of course I want money, and I mean to have it. But I want to get it for myself. This custom of inheritance is the greatest humbug of civilisation. If you are going to make love to a woman, where do you look for the fun of the thing? Evidently to the trouble you will be at to make her return your passion, and to the doubt whether you will succeed. It's the same in other things. If your woman loves you without asking, or was made so that she couldn't help loving you, you don't care twopence whether she loves you or not. If I had my fortune ready made, I should lose several things. I should lose the uncertainty as to whether I might not turn up some morning with nothing to eat—which is the only decent sauce for one's victuals that has been invented yet. I should lose the fun of making other men stand and deliver—which is about what making money means, as far as I can see. I should lose the pleasure of feeling that the money I spent was worth something, which is the only way to get any excitement out of extravagance. To put it epigrammatically—if you were to leave me a thousand pounds as a legacy, I would chuck it into the fire; but if I saw you put it in your pocket, I would have it out, if I had to cut your throat first. Look here, Stanhope—there is a certain personage mentioned in the Bible for whom I feel a particular sympathy and regard; and he describes himself as going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it—or words to that effect. On the other hand, there is a sweet, respectable phrase current, "to settle in life," which would mean, as far as I'm concerned, to stop living altogether. I want to get everything, but I mean to keep nothing. Of course you know I'm a fool, Stanhope,' said Sinclair, suddenly altering his tone from humorous mockery to frank simplicity, and putting his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder. 'I talk to

you as I should talk to no other man, because you are the only man who really understands me, or who cares a fig whether I am alive or dead. Either that, or your port is damnably potent!'

'My dear fellow,' said Maurice, considerably moved, 'there is no man alive who has a better heart than you have; and if you ever should want anything that I can do for you, you know I'll do it. What are your intentions at present?'

'I have a sort of roving commission from a London company to look into the condition of some mines in this neighbourhood. You know—don't you?—that I rather went in for geology once; it has been a pet idea of mine for a long while to find gold. I'm certain that gold will be found wholesale somewhere, before many years are over; though whether on this side of the world or the other I won't undertake to say. Meanwhile, you may expect to see me turn up here at odd moments for some time to come.'

'Make my house your head-quarters, whenever you can manage it,' said the baronet hospitably. 'Not that I can offer you any particular attractions, except a little fishing and riding and that sort of thing. But I'd like you to know Kate Roland: her character is very like yours, in a feminine way, and you ought to be great friends.'

'Well, I'd rather be the friend of a woman than her enemy, as a general thing,' answered Sinclair, laughing. 'But I don't think she is persuaded of my merits so far. I make much better progress with your little intended with the black eyes. That young lady will lead somebody a dance one of these days, if I'm not mistaken. She means to be an actress.'

'That will never come to anything,' said Maurice, shaking his head sagaciously. Her mother was an actress, and the little thing may have inherited a touch of the disease; but it'll soon die out. She's her father's child as well, and though he happened to be a scamp, he had Vivian blood in him, and the Vivians know the value of property and position.'

'Who was her mother?' Sinclair inquired.

'I don't know; only I've heard she was astonishingly good-looking. Madeleine used to wear a locket that had a miniature in it, which I believe was supposed to be a portrait of her mother. But I haven't seen it since she got back from America; probably she lost it there.'

'I should say she featured her mother's family more than her father's,' observed Sinclair.

'Children's faces change a good deal between ten and twenty. Aren't you going to take any more wine? Then suppose we join the ladies.'

They went upstairs and entered the drawing-room just as Kate Roland was defending Mr. Sinclair against a rather atrabilarious onslaught from Miss Vivian. Lady Maurice was listening to the discussion with an amused serenity of expression; and of Madeleine nothing was visible but her slender black legs, as she sat buried in a chair in a remote corner of the room, with a huge volume of Shakespeare held upright on her knees before her.

CHAPTER XXI.

In which an heiress, a beauty, and a genius finds a difficulty in disposing of herself, and is in danger of throwing herself away.

But time will not stand still, children will not be children always, and the conscientious historian is bound to remember that a judicious selection from the materials at his disposal is apt to meet with quite as much favour at his reader's hand, as a day to day journal of events could hope to secure. The present writer, accordingly, finds himself constrained to pass somewhat rapidly over the occurrences of the next few years; and he does so with the less reluctance, inasmuch as these years were for the most part barren of any important matter. Certain it is, at all events, that nothing happened during this time to impair the validity of Miss Madeleine Vivian's title to the inheritance of Castlemere. The young lady herself grew up and matured rapidly; and few who had seen the quaint, angular child, would have recognised her in the supple, graceful figure, the dusky marble face, and flashing eyes of later years. Quite the average amount of attention had, of course, been given to Madeleine's education; but the education which made her what she was she had really given herself. Independence was one of her cardinal points, and it was held by most of her friends to make dead against her; and so, in the case of most girls, it might have done. But by and by it began to be seen that Madeleine was a girl of an altogether peculiar kind, possessing within herself a great many resources and adjustments which, in the case of the majority of young people, have to be supplied from outside. Whether she understood herself, intellectually, better than any one else could understand her; or whether some happy instinctive chance always led her to choose what was most fitted to her needs, at all events she throve admirably under her own administration, and when she allowed herself to adopt foreign advice and contributions, she did so in a way of her own, so that the effect they had upon her was other than the advisers had anticipated. And although, in the matter of accomplishments, she underwent adornment enough to have deprived an ordinary spirit of all spontaneity and unconsciousness, Madeleine remained with all the bloom and individuality of her nature unimpaired. The culture was there, but it had sunk deep beneath the surface, leaving the outside fresh and pure; and it made itself felt indirectly and unobtrusively, as only that culture which has been profoundly assimilated will do. The fact must have been that her nature was so powerful in degree as well as singular in kind, as to be able to consume a vast amount of nutriment without heaviness, but, on the contrary, with joyful increase of essential vitality. Abounding

power, indeed, she had, albeit of a strictly feminine sort; as will sufficiently appear in the following history.

Her visible performances during this intermediary stage of her life were not, however, remarkable. She was seen, after her coming out, where most young Englishwomen of like fortune and position were seen, and she seemed to do pretty much the same as they did. Many marriageable men made her acquaintance; but though her aspect was admired and her mind respected, she was not exactly a social favourite. Probably few people were able or inclined to make the mental effort necessary to comprehend her. A woman of great parts needs to show and use but a very small portion of the armament at her disposal in order to fulfil all the requirements of society, and her acquaintances, though they may be obscurely aware that there is a good deal of unexplained reserve in the background, do not feel it incumbent upon themselves to invite it forth. Society must sail on even keel over a sea which must be smooth, though it flow above dead men's bones and all grotesque and tragic horrors. If any one casts a demure glance of curiosity into those pregnant depths, he must not allow what he sees there to disconcert the urbane composure of his visage. If he himself, whether by chance or of purpose, sink beneath the surface, no boat must be lowered, nor any rope thrown over, for his rescue. The decorous passengers must still pace the dapper decks as unconsciously as before, and the look-out must still report all well, and fair weather present and to come. There is no doubt a certain fascination in this gay and solemn humbug. It implies a kind of bastard stoicism, which, for the sake of a glossy external serenity, suppresses everything that bleeds and breathes and speaks the startling language of humanity.

There were two opposing tendencies in Madeleine's character, whose opposition kept her quiet for the time; and until one finally overcame the other, or they found some way to work together, it might have been evident to a discerning eye that she would never accomplish anything. One was a conservative and conventional tendency, the other original and revolutionary. She saw with perfect clearness the vast advantages which were at her disposal, if she would only take her latter self by the throat and strangle it; and, on the other hand, she divined unerringly the certain perils and possible disaster which threatened that self, if she gave way to its promptings. Indeed, strict prudence scarcely admitted the choice to be a debatable one. To accept an assured place and rank amidst the greatest and wealthiest aristocracy in the world; and to attempt a dubious career upon the stage, where there was everything to lose, and only, at best, an actress's fame to win—surely no well-balanced mind could hesitate here!

Of course not. But then, after all, for a girl like Madeleine, the choice was not so much between one kind of life and another, as between life and death—the death, that is to say, of all that could give her life reality and significance in her own eyes. If she became

a leader of society, she would simply be doing what any self-possessed fool could do; and all that unfathomed well of force and genius, whereof her inmost soul spoke to her, must be closed over and ignored. Doubtless to close it over might be the prudent course; but it was at least a question whether it were a possible one. The well might develop the characteristics of a volcano. But again, what if the force and genius should turn out, upon experiment, to be an illusion? The history of human errors unquestionably contained the record of many a not less hapless discovery, made too late. How could she tell that other girls had not felt the same impulses that she felt, and had had the sense to say nothing about them?

Moreover, Madeleine had a strong impression of duty. She was not free: obligations had been laid upon her which she was bound—under certain conscientious penalties at least—to render account of. The stewardship of a great property had been intrusted to her by one who certainly did not contemplate her going on the stage, and who would probably have disposed of his possessions otherwise, could he have foreseen that contingency. It was therefore open to her to defend herself against herself by the plea of self-sacrifice—never a weak plea with a woman of her temperament. As to surrendering the property in exchange for the stage, that was an idea that did not recommend itself to her. She had a vigorous sense of possession—an instinct for standing up for her rights. She would of course give away all she possessed for love, but not a farthing, if she could help it, upon any sort of compulsion; and love had as yet required of her no such surrender.

Now, these inward conflicts of hers, though society knew nothing of them, were not entirely hidden from the more intimate of her acquaintances; and they took sides—some one side, some the other. Madeleine had, from an early period, insisted upon taking lessons in elocution and kindred branches from a distinguished French professor of those accomplishments, and this step had aroused the vehement opposition of her relatives, as well as of Lady Maurice and Sir Stanhope, though Lady Maurice was less dogmatic than her son upon the subject, being a person of deeper experience and more tolerant temper; but Aunt Maria and Uncle Clanroy were quite uncompromising in their disapproval. The major's wife, strange to say, rather showed a tendency to support the elocutionary party; but it may be doubted whether this lady's motive in so doing was wholly controlled by elocutionary considerations. Two thorough-going aiders and abettors, however, Madeleine had; one of them was Kate Roland, the other, Bryan Sinclair. Only, while Kate's advocacy was open and declared, Bryan's was avowed unreservedly to Madeleine alone.

This fact may suggest the suspicion that the relations between Madeleine and Bryan were not of an entirely commonplace character. But before investigating that matter it will be necessary to touch upon another thing or two. It may be remembered that a scheme

was on foot to bring about an alliance between the families of Vivian and Maurice in the persons of their latest descendants; the only drawbacks being the faint one of Madeleine's possible failure to inherit, and the still less important one of the not impossible indifference towards each other of the immediate parties to the contract. Before the time of Madeleine's growth into womanly proportions, Sir Stanhope had in fact been so far indifferent as not to conceal his willingness to postpone any serious consideration of the affair to an indeterminate future; and Madeleine of course had not troubled her head at all on the subject. But later on the complexion of things changed very considerably. Lady Maurice could not help seeing, in Madeleine's dramatic predilections, a new reason for observing caution with regard to the contemplated connection. But Sir Stanhope, much as he deprecated the said predilections, had found himself constrained not only to abandon his indifference towards the heiress of Castlemere, but to go to the other extreme of feeling. In plain words, he had fallen suddenly and vehemently in love with her; and the passion, wholly free as it was from any lower form of interestedness, did no small credit to his manhood and to his perceptions. For, as has been already intimated, Madeleine was not a lady for whom any chance comer would have had either the capacity or the audacity to profess an affection.

But even the physical part of her possessed at this time an inexhaustible fascination for those who were able to appreciate it. Her figure seemed rather tall, partly owing to her gait and bearing, which were at once flexible and dignified. Her bust was small, but exquisitely moulded; below her waist the full arch of her hips swept down with an elastic curve to the knee, and thence tapered to the ankle of her slender foot. Her arms were slender and long, but finely rounded, like the arms of Eastern women; long also were the wrists and narrow oval hands. Her walk was at times indolent and leisurely, at times swift and full of repressed power and purpose; but always distinguished by a peculiar gliding undulation. Every movement expressed an inherent and faultless, yet unconscious grace; she was fertile in refined but telling gestures, yet was so reticent of them that each one conveyed a meaning or illustrated it. It was only impossible to her to be awkward or physically unintelligent. But hers was not a merely animal gracefulness. You felt that she was *grande dame*. The distinction is a great though an impalpable one.

The poise of her head upon her neck yielded to the beholder the same kind of pleasure that is afforded by the contemplation of the slender but sufficient support which a Grecian column gives to its pediment. The great mass of her hair had softness without glossiness; its dense black was repeated in her eyes, which were heavy-lidded, and did not reveal their full size and power except under the influence of emotion, when they kindled and expanded. They were set unusually far apart in the head, and had a slight upward slant at

the outer corners. The eyebrows were very long and fine, and nearly met above the nose. Her forehead was wide, and seemed low, owing to the way the hair grew upon it; but the arch of the head was high and capacious. The nose was slightly aquiline, and larger than is usual among women of western blood; the nostrils being full and finely shaped, and expanding readily under the influence of excitement or anger. The line of the cheek, somewhat prominent beneath the eyes, curved inward thence, but again came forward to join the salient contour of the chin. Her mouth, which was rather large, with delicately cut lips, had an inexhaustible variety of movement, sometimes curving into perfect beauty, sometimes straightening almost into a red line; the teeth were evenly formed, and of a mellow whiteness. It was a face of the widest range of expression; in grave moods it looked profoundly solemn, and much older than it was; a face of a type dating back to the earlier days of human history; but always with a fund in it of unconquerable youth. The smile came over it like the light of a special providence, illuminating the brow and eyes, narrowing the charming space between the mouth and the nose, and sending the smooth chin forward; and when Madeleine lifted this chin, by way of sobering herself, as it were, the effect was indescribably winning and lovely. Her voice, when raised, was deep and sonorous, and her utterance was always rather measured than rapid, and distinct as a bell.

Here, then, was excuse enough for falling in love, even had there been nothing else. But there was a great deal besides; for he who won her confidence and good will, found more wealth and novelty of feminine human nature in an hour of Madeleine than in a lifetime of ordinary women. To such fortunate people she was a new and immeasurable experience, and therefore had for them, in addition to her native charm, the value attaching to a private discovery (as they supposed) of their own. No higher indirect compliment can be paid to a woman than this; for it indicates that her attractions are so refined and rare that no man believes any one except himself to possess the delicacy and cultivation of mind requisite to their appreciation.

Now, Madeleine, though very kindly disposed towards Sir Stanhope, was not in love with him; but he would not despair, because, in the first place, he saw that her mind was so much exercised on the subject of her future career, that it was no wonder if the voice of her heart was temporarily hushed; and because, secondly, she was not, as far as he was aware, in love with any one else. On the one hand, he was embarrassed by some modifications which had taken place in the conditions of their intercourse. He had been compelled during the last year or two to spend the greater part of his time in London, owing to the pressure of some interests which seemed superior to those of the ideal country gentleman's life which he had originally proposed to himself; to tell the truth, he had been induced by Sinclair to concern himself in some of the mining projects which that restless

gentleman had promoted; and the meetings of the directors in the city could not dispense with his presence. Madeleine, meanwhile, had finally come to an open disagreement with her Aunt Maria; and leaving that unpersuadable personage in London, she had betaken herself for the nonce to Devonshire, where she would have remained with no other companion than the professional lady in reduced circumstances, who, in exchange for the comforts of a home, would be willing to confer the advantages of her company and conversation, had not Kate Roland unexpectedly offered to fill the post in question. Kate had always maintained that Madeleine should be allowed to follow her own judgment as to her own life; and had supplemented this opinion by one still more bold, namely, that it was on the stage that Madeleine's true vocation was to be found. And since Kate was a woman given to backing-up her opinions by acts, it followed that when she saw Madeleine in need, she abandoned her comfortable existence with Lady Maurice and went to her. A better companion Madeleine could not have found; and she made Kate the repository of all her secrets—except one. She even told her about her adventure in the New England cave, and her fanciful expectation of some day meeting once more the brown-haired boy in the deerskin shirt and leggings who had so hospitably entertained her on that alarming night.

'And when you do meet him—what then?' Kate inquired, looking up with a laugh.

Madeleine shook her head.

'Nothing. If I had stayed with him in the cave, we might have lived very happily together for the rest of our lives, perhaps. But now, of course, he is nothing but a dream; and really, I hope I shall never meet him. He is a hero to me now in a way no other man can ever be. If I should see him, it would not be so well.'

'Oh, come, Madey, don't talk nonsense to me, my dear. You are not going to get through life without falling in love and marrying. At least, I shall be disappointed in you if you do.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Madeleine, and paused.

'Look here, Madey—you won't mind my speaking, will you?—Stanhope's awfully in love with you. I wish you'd marry him. I'm sure you couldn't find an honester man.'

'He didn't approve of my——'

'You can make that the condition; you marry him on condition that he enters into all your plans. He'll do it quick enough. I want to see you well married. I think you'd be safer.'

'I think I shall never do anything wise,' said Madeleine, gazing out of the window. After a pause she added, 'I see some one coming—ah! it is Mr. Sinclair.'

'Do you want him here? I don't like him—I don't trust him, at least. He's very entertaining, but I don't believe he'll ever do any one any good.'

'There is something great in him,' said Madeleine, slowly.

'There's something about him—I don't deny that. I remember he impressed me a good deal when I first saw him; he seemed a man who could do anything. As for his simplicity and ingenuousness, they never imposed on me much; but one can allow for that, if the man is really strong enough to make up for it. But the only way you can judge of a man like that is by what he does; and Sinclair hasn't done anything in particular that I can see, except raise a great fuss about mines that don't turn out anything,—and bewitch that poor fellow Tom Berne, who used to be a very nice respectable man before he came.'

'Bewitched him?'

'Well, don't be a basilisk, my dear! All I know is, Tom was a perfectly steady man, and a good husband and father, up to the very day Sinclair first came here; and since then he has been full of drink and idleness, and he's followed Sinclair about like a spaniel. I believe he would commit a murder or jump into the sea if Sinclair were to tell him to do it. That's the most remarkable thing I know about Sinclair, after all. I shouldn't like him to have that power over me!'

Madeleine rose erect from her chair, and stood abstracted, with her fingers resting against her temples and her eyes dwelling on vacancy.

'When one is bewitched—does one know it?' she said at length; but as if questioning herself rather than her companion.

'Why, he hasn't bewitched you, too, has he?' said Kate, with her quick laugh.

'There's no truth in it; may not one man have more power than another without witchcraft?' Having said this, Madeleine resumed her seat. After a while she said, 'If Stanhope wishes me to marry him he must make me. But he does not wish it so much as that.'

'Dear me! must he come and tie you up with ropes and drag you before a suborned priest, and read the marriage service with a pistol at your head? Those things can't be done nowadays, my dear. And I don't think I should want them if they could.'

'No. I mean, if I loved any one, I would do anything. He could do anything with me.'

'What? make you give up going on the stage too?' demanded Kate, laughing.

'Yes, anything!'

'Dear me! Then I wish you'd fall in love with Stanhope as quick as possible, for I'm sure he'd never wish you to do anything you oughtn't to do; other people might.'

'It is a year before I have my property,' said Madeleine, smiling.

'Now, my dear, you know he'd take you without a shilling. Other people might not.'

'What other people do you mean?' inquired Madeleine, turning her face and looking at her friend.

Kate Roland was a very fearless woman, but in answering this question she found it necessary to take a long breath and summon all her courage. For though she knew that Madeleine loved her, and though their intimacy was sincere and cordial, yet there was always something in Madeleine's eyes that told of reserves which would not be unveiled; and Madeleine was not the sort of woman you would select to take a liberty with. Nevertheless, Kate's keen and sensible eyes had discerned some things of late which had given her uneasiness; and as she was the only person in the world who had the opportunity of counselling Madeleine at all, she felt bound not to flinch from the opportunity when it came. So she said—

'Well, I'll tell you. I know you'll be angry, but I can't help it. I was thinking of Mr. Sinclair. I don't know anything about it; you haven't told me, and of course he hasn't. I feel sure he'd make you unhappy. He may care for you—I don't suppose he could help it—but he cares for other things too, and he might come to care for them more. He said something to Stanhope once that Stanhope thought was very fine, and I thought was at least very true. He said, "I wish to get everything, but I mean to keep nothing." That's the man exactly. Stanhope is infatuated with him—almost as much as poor Tom Berne is; and I might be infatuated with him too, only I'm determined I won't allow it. I don't care whether you call it witchcraft, or what you call it; you know I care for you very much, and I'd rather harm should happen to me than to you. I think you ought to send Mr. Sinclair away. He'll do you no good. He wants to get you, perhaps, and all that belongs to you; but he won't want to keep you. You can manage yourself now, if you will. If you wait any longer it may be too late. There, I've made my speech. I shan't say any more till I'm asked.'

Madeleine had listened to the speech with, at any rate, attention. Some of the words and sentences had made marks, as it were, on her face. Her eyes had glowed and darkened again. Her nostrils had expanded, and her hands, folded in her lap, had strained together with fingers interlaced; her bosom rose and fell in deep undulations. But by the time Kate had done speaking, she had nearly composed herself; and then the first thing she did was to smile.

'Even if I felt towards Mr. Sinclair as you suspect,' she said, 'I could not see anything terrible in it. To love a man is the greatest thing a woman can do. The man who can make her love him has given her the most precious gift that can be given. It would not matter much, after that, what happened. He might take away her life—he might desert her; but she would have loved him. Whoever will make me love him, may kill me afterwards, if he will.'

Kate Roland believed herself, not without reason, to know something of what love was; but she was not prepared for this position on her friend's part, and could not immediately reply. Before she could collect her thoughts, Mr. Sinclair was announced, and in he walked.

'You don't look glad to see me,' he said to Kate, after he had shaken hands with her.

'I generally manage to look as I feel, Mr. Sinclair,' she replied.

'I wish you liked me better,' said he, not laughing at the rebuff, but accepting it with a sort of cordial seriousness that was one of his most puzzling characteristics. 'However, as it is,' he added, sitting down, so that he faced the two ladies, and folding his arms over his great chest, 'as it is, I have good news for you.'

'What? has the mine begun to pay?'

'Better than that. You have no share in the mine; and if it were to pay, you would lose the satisfaction of saying "I told you so!" It isn't the mine.'

'I'm not going to guess again.'

Sinclair chuckled.

'Because you know what you want it to be, and you are afraid of being disappointed. But you would have been right. It *is* that. I'm going away.'

Kate, following the impulse of the moment, looked at Madeleine, regretting the instant after that she had done so. But Madeleine, who had not yet spoken a word, sat like marble. Her eyes, which had been fixed on Sinclair since his entrance, did not swerve from him now, nor did their expression alter, so far as Kate could see.

'Where are you going?' the latter asked, half mechanically.

'Oh, far enough. To America. And be gone a year.'

'What are you going there for?' pursued Kate, feeling it strange that she should be carrying on the conversation alone, but fearing to force Madeleine to take part in it.

'That I can't reveal, even to you two ladies,' returned Sinclair. 'It is a secret which the whole world will know before long; but not a soul till I am ready.'

'Is this your farewell call?' said Madeleine, in so unconstrained a tone that Kate first felt sure that all her suspicions had been wrong; and afterwards, upon reflection, was more inclined than ever to think that they had been right.

'No; I shall come to do that to-morrow,' Sinclair answered. He got up from his chair and walked about the room. 'I came in to-day—well, to put you in a mood to part with me in peace to-morrow, Mrs. Roland. As for you, Madeleine, I believe you will be sorry to have me go. Though why you should be better disposed towards me than Mrs. Roland, is something I never shall know. Well, till to-morrow then.'

'We shall be having tea soon, if you care to stay,' said Madeleine, rising and coming towards him. Kate still remained seated. Her colour was high, and her hands trembled a little; she felt as if some calamity were in the air, which she could not avert. Nothing disturbed her more than Madeleine's composure.

Sinclair was standing at this moment before one of the windows which looked out towards the sea, and from which the ruined tower

on the seaward front of the castle could be seen. Madeleine, after approaching within a few feet of him, paused.

'No, I can't stay now,' he said. 'By the way, do you know when the moon rises?'

Madeleine looked at him in silence. He returned her look.

'Now I think of it,' he said after a moment, 'it is at half-past twelve. Half-past twelve. I remember once standing on that broken buttress of the tower, and seeing the moon rise out of the sea. I wonder when I shall do that again! Next year, perhaps, at this time. What was I going to say? Well, never mind; I shall remember to-morrow. Good-bye for the present.' He shook hands with Madeleine, and then came forwards to Kate, and shook hands with her also. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Roland. Let your memories of me be as indulgent as possible. After all, I'm a human being, and whatever there is in me, good or bad, must be in human nature.'

'I haven't had time to think or say anything——' began Kate.

Sinclair nodded.

'But you'll all be ready for me to-morrow,' he said; and then he left the room.

Whether or not the moon rose at half-past twelve that night will never be known; but, be that as it may, there can be no doubt that, if she had done so, and the sky had been clear, her light would have fallen on Madeleine Vivian and Bryan Sinclair, as they sat on a fallen cornice-stone, near the brink of the cliff that rose above the swirling river. They talked together in low tones.

'There's no other way,' Bryan was saying, 'unless you would come with me.'

'You have not asked me to do that.'

'Do you mean that you would?'

'You have not asked me.'

'Good heavens! what a girl. Well, you do know how to love. Madey, you and I will have a grand life of it when I come back. Yes, when I come back. I'm not given to stick at trifles, but I'll be hanged if I'll take you to California.'

'And you are sure——' She stopped.

'Sure to come back? As sure as I'm alive to come.'

'Yes; but are you sure you will find me as you left me?'

'I am sure you won't forget me, if that's what you mean.'

'Do not be too sure. You have made me something different from what I was before. I don't know what I may do, Bryan. Now that I know what love is, why may I not love the first clown I meet, after you are gone? Oh, my love! But I would kill him—or myself! Oh, my love—my love! Bryan, how dare you leave me?'

'Kiss me. You can kiss no other man as you kiss me, Madey. You can love no man as you love me. It is my hand that has you by the heart. A hundred women before you have loved me. You are the only woman I ever loved. When I cease to love you, it will be because no love is left in me for any living creature. You satisfy me.

I know, as well as I know that my arms are round you, that no woman in the world is your equal. We are matched.'

'It seems to me that to hate you and to love you are the same. I don't know which I do. I know you are not good.'

'Well—I can't stand this! Now I am going.'

'I think—I hope—I hate you!'

'Hate me like this! Good-bye!'

When Sinclair had left Madeleine and the town, he walked rapidly down the slope and across the meadows until he came to a lane which bordered the Castlemere land, and formed a line of communication between the interior and the high-road. He walked with his arms swinging forcibly beside him, and his head bent down; and once, when he stumbled upon a stone in the path, he gave vent to a savage oath. At last he came to the point where the lane joined the road; and there, in the centre of the open space, a man was standing with a valise in his hand and a parcel under his arm. Sinclair came close up to him.

'Now, Tom Berne, have you done all I told you?'

'Yes.'

'Look at me, Tom; I'm not in a mood to be played with. "Yes"—what?'

'Yes, master.'

'Have you given your wife that fifty pounds?'

'Yes, master.'

'Did she have any suspicion where you were going?'

'No, master.'

'Have you drunk anything to day? One drop?'

'No, master.'

'You scoundrel! down on your knees and swear it—down, I say!'

The man dropped on his knees, lifted up his right hand, and swore.

'Very well, Tom Berne,' said the other, laughing in a slow, inward way; 'now you may get up. I have no objection to your getting as drunk as you please, when I have no occasion for your services. But if ever I find you drunk when I do want you—my poor Tom, what a bad day that will be for you! Now get up, you dog; and go on before me!'

Tom set off at a round pace along the road, and his master followed him, with his head again sunk upon his breast.

CHAPTER XXII.

The hills were brown, the heavens were blue,
A woodpecker pounded a pine-top shell,
While a partridge whistled the whole day through
For a rabbit to dance in the chaparral,
And a gray grouse drummu'd 'All's well, all's well.'

In the year 1847, the valley of the Sacramento was, upon the whole, rather deficient in human interest. It was a magnificent country and nothing more. Its sky was not a surface, but an unfathomable depth of living and glowing azure. Its sun blazed with a glorious intensity of brightness. Its transparent nights were tender with a summer that perpetually renewed itself; lit by stars that waxed and flickered like rainbow-tinted flames. Its mountains were dark with pines, and crested here and there with everlasting snow; its dales were gardens of fertility and beauty, watered by rivers rushing blue and white over sparkling sands and veins of quartz. Its precipices sprang aloft a thousand feet at a bound, and dizzy pinnacles of stone shot upward as high again. Its cañons were deep and dark, plunging downwards until it seemed as if they sought the bowels of the earth. Its storms were terrible and titanic, blackening the heavens, roaring with rain, shivering with blinding lightnings, and cleaving the air with thunderbolts. Its atmosphere was the breath of immortal life—an ethereal wine that made old age feel young, and youth divine. Its sleep was dreamless and its waking joyful. Fat deer and antlered elk wandered tame through the listening forests; the grizzly, the black bear, and the querulous coyote growled and barked in the thicket, and in the rocky gorges, and along the ridges of the hills. Long-eared hares limped across the glades, crested partridges whistled from the coverts, trout thronged the streams and lakes; the call of the cakea sounded by night from hillside to hillside, while the sweet nuts of the sugar-pine dropped from cones well-nigh a yard in length. It was a carnival of nature in her most vigorous and wholesome mood, but lacking in social polish. The face of the white man was seldom seen in these populous solitudes. A few hunters or cattle-dealers traversed the woodland trails occasionally, coming eastward from the Pacific, or crossing the mountain rampart from Oregon. But there was no symptom as yet of the headlong and feverish colonisation of a year or two later.

Indians there were of course. But Indians are not people in one sense of the word. They were a grave, wild, silent, ominous race, half mystical enthusiast, and half wild beast. Nothing that can be found nowadays in California can give any idea of the wildness of the Indian of the first half of this century. You could tell them by their seat on horseback as far off as you could see them on the plains; no white man ever sat his horse so. In the Indian's eyes, and in the

flattened prominence of the cheek beneath, there was something untamable and alien to eastern civilisation; and the strange grasp of his hand on yours sent a thrill through your blood, as if a bear or a wolf should speak and claim kindred with you. They knew no forms of greeting, but met and parted like animals or like children, gravely and in silence. You might be aware of their villages by the blue smoke of their wigwams, but not by any noise that came from them. They pondered solemnly in the few lines of thought they cultivated, and were too secure in their conclusions to be disconcerted or surprised at whatever novelty you might unfold to them. They concerned themselves about a future state of existence to an extent that would have disgusted the prosperous positivist of our day and humour; and believed in the happy hunting-grounds more potently than in their material ones even. Their young men saw visions, and their old men dreamed dreams; spirits walked and talked with them; their warriors, on the eve of battle, foretold what fate awaited them, and felt the might of their ancestors nerve the arm that wielded the tomahawk and scalping-knife. Ghosts quelled the courage that mortal foemen could not subdue; and many a stalwart savage cast away his life at the beck of a viewless spectre, whose fancied resentment he would rather perish than arouse. Strange men they were, whose mystery no seer nor poet has wholly fathomed; and now all save the effigy of them is extinct. As little do we know whence they came as whither they have gone. Wild, dark, solemn, the procession passes before our eyes, and the light of modern times rests upon it for a moment; but its origin and its issue are alike lost in mysterious shadows of surmise and doubt.

Before the face of the white man the Indian retires and dwindles, aware of a fatal inferiority. When driven to fight him, he does so by surprises and treachery, as becomes one struggling against a superior and uncomprehended power; and when he gets his enemy down he is careful to scalp him, lest the unconquered ghost should get the better of him after all. But if the American Indian had invaded Europe instead of the contrary, he would have proved himself the most tractable and good-natured invader known to history. For it is probable that he does not enjoy being killed for its own sake; only, when he has to confront extermination in any case, he prefers to do so fighting, from motives of self-respect. Meanwhile, upon reasonable grounds, he is capable of becoming a useful and not unedifying companion; in fact, he exercises a species of fascination over the talkative and fussy votaries of our civilisation which, if it be yielded to a little, becomes difficult to break away from. It is too late now; but a generation ago, a European in quest of a thoroughly new sensation could get it by taking up his abode in the forests of the west. The inhabitant of an Indian village has no newspapers and receives no letters. His politics are chiefly domestic, and evolve themselves within narrow areas; and they are not discussed, because discussion would not alter them. It is true that Indians hold pow-wows, but all they talk about are

the warlike deeds of their ancestors and themselves; and their object in touching upon these topics is to inspire themselves for fresh enterprises. Social small-talk and gossip is also unknown; if a society journal were started amongst a tribe of Indians, its numbers from week to week would contain nothing but the title, the date, and the names of the printer and publisher. It is in the worst taste to discuss marriages and betrothals in Indian circles, such matters being considered private and delicate. Art is as little a subject of conversation as literature, politics, and society; and as for nature, it is far too near to the Indian, and too mysterious and spiritual to his apprehension, for him to venture upon speaking about it. The things of the objective life being thus shut out from the red man's consideration, subjective matters alone remain open to him; and these are good for thought rather than for speech, and minister more to the repose of the mind than to its excitement. It is evident, therefore, that a year or two of strictly Indian society would embark the white man upon entirely novel lines of life; it would speedily acquaint him with the extent of his own resources, and, if he were at all imaginative, would make him seem to himself the creature of a higher power—a visible appearance acted upon and animated by invisible realities. In other words, his outward life would be the expression of an inward impulse—inward, yet proceeding from something that was not himself. The motives as well as the acts of civilisation are external. In so far as they are not external, they are not civilisation.

Naturally, very few white men would care to make so wide a divergence from the beaten track as this; least of all those whose organisation is sensitive and fine. To them the vital repose would be scarcely distinguishable from death; and long ere they had become reconciled to it, they would desire to escape. A coarse, uneducated, fleshly-witted man might take to it well enough, but not a high-strung one. Not, at least, if he had tasted the thin but heady wine of modern culture and science. But how, if, never having tasted this, he was yet of the blood and make of those to that manner born? No doubt, the conditions would then be sensibly modified. He might become an Indian then, but an Indian on a higher plane of thought and sensation. He would feel and act like them, but he would think about his acts and feelings, as they do not, and would thus draw inferences and arrive at conclusions from which they are debarred.

Now, it so happened that a couple of white men had, for several years past, been living with a certain tribe of Indians who, in 1847, dwelt in the Sacramento valley. One of these men was much older than the other—the latter, indeed, being in the first prime of his youth. They had come by a northerly route from the far east, having travelled, apparently, from tribe to tribe of Indians until they came to Oregon, and so across the mountain rampart to the Sacramento. The elder was a stalwart, bearded fellow, with a long rifle on his shoulder, and wearing a tattered red shirt, corduroy trousers, and heavy boots. The younger was slender, but tall and sinewy, and full of tireless

activity. He wore an Indian shirt and leggings of deerskin, fringed and beaded; his arms were a bow and arrows, and he carried slung at his back a strange musical instrument, the like whereof no Indian had ever seen before. Though blue-eyed and brown-haired, and betraying no signs of Indian blood, he spoke a dialect of the Indian language; and he and his companion, being evidently innocent of any hostile intent, were freely admitted to the hospitality of the tribe. They made their abode amongst them, took part in their hunting excursions, and joined them in their attacks upon neighbouring tribes, or helped them to repel the latter's incursions. And inasmuch as they bore themselves well and bravely in all circumstances, and moreover seemed to know a good many things which the ordinary Indian education did not include, they gradually assumed a prominent place in the red men's councils; and the younger man held the higher position of the two. He was something more than brave and active; he was credited with supernatural powers. At all events, he could produce wonderful sounds from that musical instrument of his; and sometimes he seemed to be unaware of what was passing around him, but to see and speak with beings that were visible to him only. He possessed, too, a singular power over wild animals, as if there were some secret intelligence between him and them. He could carry poisonous serpents in his hand; he could stroke the ears of the grey hare in her form; and he was said to be on friendly terms with a certain huge black bear, who was anything but a genial companion to other two-legged beings. On moonlight nights, he often left the lodge and moved down, unarmed and silent, to the margin of a neighbouring lake. There, hidden amidst the bushes, he would lie for hours, while the great bright moon swung slowly aloft, mid-deep in the purple sky, and the wild coyotes came trotting and pausing, one by one, to lap their nightly draughts of the pure water. There would he lie, listening to their long-drawn, unearthly howls, till all his blood curdled and thrilled, and his breath came and went with a fearful delight. Wildest of all beasts is the wolf, and wildest of all wolves is the coyote. As the hours went by a kind of mystic exhilaration would swell in the listener's heart, and throb in his brain; until at last he could scarce restrain himself from howling likewise, and capering fantastically forth from his hiding-place, to patter and gambol, and roll over and over with the other wolves on the moon-smitten margin of the lake. Such hours as those open the mind to knowledge which no human wisdom can impart.

As for the elder man, he had seen the world under many aspects, and had acquired a give-and-take, matter-of-fact philosophy, which admitted of little essential change. There was nothing imaginative or mystical about him. When he exerted himself, it was with all his strength; when there was no call for exertion, he was well content to lie on his back in the sun, smoking or dozing, or, at most, recalling disconnected scenes from the life that was past. Into the future he never troubled himself to look, nor was he anxious for change. 'If a

man is comfortable,' he would argue, 'let him keep quiet; the other things will come fast enough of themselves.' He would also remove his pipe from his mouth to remark, 'moving about ain't no use. A man can't get out of himself by travellin', nor he can't get no further into himself, neither. As for friends and relatives, what be they? You may take my word for it, Jack, nobody can be more than glad to see you; and, in a general way, the folks you're with at the time will be as glad as anybody. If I was to start for home to-morrow, what would I find when I got there? The same I left behind me twenty years ago? Not much I wouldn't! They may be alive for what I know; but they ain't the same folks I'm thinking of, for all that. I sha'n't find them, Jack, my boy, not in this world, nor in the next neither. But I'm none the worse off for that. Human natur's the same, good and bad, all the world over. I can get all I want in the way of friends and relatives out of you—or maybe I could do with old Tabanaka here, at a pinch. Good words, and friendliness, and help in a scrape, and an honest look in the eye—that's all the best of 'em can give me, and I can get that and more too where I be. I may live here till I die, for all I'll ever do to get away.'

'You care to go no further because you've been everywhere,' Jack would reply. 'So shall I, perhaps, some day.'

'Oh, ay, I know; every man must be a fool on his own account; it's no use another man being a fool for him. You're in the Garden of Eden this very minute, only you don't know it. You'll remember I told you that, ten years hence. Here's a climate that ain't got no equal. You've plenty to eat and drink, and just as much huntin' and fightin' as may keep you in right condition. All these red fellows here think no end of big things of you, and when old Tabanaka pegs out, you'll be chief for certain. And as for women——'

The speaker did not finish his sentence in words, but nodded his head twice or thrice slowly, and partly closed one eye. The two men were reclining beneath the shade of a cluster of tall, trim-limbed madroño trees. At a little distance two lodges were visible, made of cedar stakes and bark, with sloping roofs, from an opening in the comb of which lazy wreaths of smoke ascended; for, though the time was summer, the fire of an Indian lodge must not be extinguished. In the door of one of these boxes a young Indian woman was sitting, with a little pile of flint arrow-heads beside her, which she was binding on their shafts. While doing this, she kept up a low crooning sound, apparently for the benefit of a small brown baby, which, swaddled like a mummy and strapped to a flat framework of woven withes and bark, was leaning against the side of the doorway like a little idol.

Jack had made no response to his companion's suggestion, or argument, whichever it was, beyond a restless drawing-up of his right knee, and a forcible emission of breath. Presently he arose, with an Indian-like suddenness and suppleness of movement, and walked with

a silent tread of moccasined feet to the door of the lodge at which the woman sat.

'Kooahi,' he said, 'are you not tired of making arrows and singing to the papoose?'

Kooahi looked up at him, throwing back her thick hair, and flashing her white teeth.

Some of the Indian women of the Pacific slope may, in their youth, fairly be called beautiful. Kooahi was small of stature and warm of hue, her skin being somewhat of the colour of red wine seen through a transparent brown medium. Her hands and feet were small and delicately formed. Her face was a full oval, with black eyes rich in softness and ardour, though deficient, according to our ideas, in depth and subtlety of expression. Her mouth was large and her lips full, but there was a sweetness and tenderness in their curves which prevented the reproach of coarseness. Her hair had an Indian depth and luxuriance; it framed her face in a flowing black frame, and descending, shed over her shoulders, bosom, and waist, a shifting veil of waving jet. From the waist to the knee she was clad in a short embroidered skirt of deerskin, this being the only garment she wore at present, except the chains of wampum round her neck, and the bands of beaten gold that encircled her arms. Every motion of her flexible figure was pervaded by an indefinable grace and elasticity, which were alone sufficient to make looking at her a pleasure.

Jack knelt on one knee and looked steadfastly for a few moments at the brown baby's solemn little phiz, which blinked composedly back at him out of its round black eyes. He stroked its round cheek with his finger, until it cooed and bobbed its head about. Then Jack turned, and his glance met the warm glance of Kooahi.

'How would you like to go away from here?' he continued—speaking of course in the Indian tongue. 'Far away—you and Manita?'

Kooahi considered the question, not averting her eyes from his the while. 'Back to my father?' she demanded at last, with a gesture towards the north.

Jack shook his head and pointed in the opposite direction. 'I captured you in battle,' he said; 'to take you back would be death. But there—far away—where white faces live, in lodges taller than the tamarack; will you come there?'

Kooahi was silent. She drooped her eyelids and looked on the ground. Jack watched her for a little; then he put out his hand and stroked her hair; and let his hand glide down her round arm till it reached her hand and closed upon it.

'We will not go, then, Kooahi,' he said. 'I brought you here, and we will live here always.'

Kooahi looked up with a flashing smile, and raising his hand in both hers, laid it upon her forehead and upon her bosom.

After a time Jack went back to the madroños; but his bearded

friend had dropped asleep, with his pipe sticking straight up in his mouth, like a strange plant sprouting out of him. There would be no getting any tales of foreign parts from him that afternoon. Jack turned away, and passing beneath the trees, came round to the principal group of lodges that constituted the village. Here the chief and three or four warriors were squatting on the ground, smoking, and listening to some tale which the oldest man in the village was droning out in a guttural voice. It was a tale of a mythologic character, and contained incidental allusions to the Indians' Paradise, which, it appeared, was a vast, illimitable forest, with valleys interspersed amidst the sombre colonnades of trees, and rivers alive with fish, and legions of game that came up to the door of your wigwam to be shot; in short, very much such a region as they live in now, only somewhat more monotonously comfortable, and enriched by the society of all their dead and buried ancestors, from the beginning of the world down to yesterday. Jack sat down with the rest, but not to listen; he had heard it all a hundred times before. Something was still wanting to make him a true Indian, to make him content to spend not his earthly life only, but the whole of eternity, in just such a valley as this of the Sacramento—this Noorkan Charook; a heaven into which no white man, except perhaps himself, was to be admitted. Jack's ideas of a future state had not been much complicated by the lore of Christian theology; nevertheless he fancied he could conceive of a heaven which should differ in some respects from that of his Indian friends, and be none the worse for the modification. Had he not had his dreams and his visions? . . . A sadness began to settle upon him, and a sense of inward darkness and terror. He knew it of old; it demanded that he should be alone. No human eye must see him, because no human heart could understand his spectral fear, nor any human strength succour him in the struggle.

He arose hastily and went forth, plunging into the densest part of the forest. A deep cañon, thronged with black pines and bedded with rock, opened before him at last, and into this he descended. The high walls rose on either side, shutting out the sun, becoming at length too steep to afford foothold to the sombre trees. The course of the cañon was crooked, so that ever and anon further progress seemed to be barred by an insurmountable wall set across the path; but at the last moment it would give way and afford a passage. Jack forced his way along over the boulders and decayed stumps with increasing speed, glancing now over his shoulder and now in advance, shuddering at the horror to come, yet knowing that sooner or later he must grapple with it. In swinging himself down a declivity, the thick limb of a tree which he had grasped was wrenched off, and remained in his hand, though he was scarcely aware of it. As he hurried on the sweat ran down his forehead, and his eyes stared in dread, yet took no conscious note of outward objects; an intolerable distress wrung his heart. Now his feet trod

upon sand; confusing shadows were in the air; the wide mouth of a cavern opened in front of him. Past that cavern he could not go—an irresistible force forbade it; for here lurked his ghostly enemy, and here the struggle must take place. With set teeth and shaking limbs he entered the cavern, which vomited a darkness that clung to his eyes. In the womb of the darkness he heard the goblin stir, and saw its eyes glimmering, and heard its snarling voice. It seemed to advance towards him; with a hoarse cry he raised his arm, with the club of cedar in his hand, and struck a furious blow, knowing that he should strike only empty air. But, with a shock of surprise, he felt that the blow had told; the demon was tangible; it howled and writhed; with desperate hope he struck again, and heard the dull thud and crash of resisting bone; and the club was broken short in his hand. With another cry he flung himself upon his enemy, grappling it by its hairy throat, and by the weight of his body holding its body to the earth. He strove to strangle it, but in vain, though the blood well-nigh started from the ends of his fingers in the effort; the goblin wrenched itself about, uttering hideous snarls and gnashing its jaws. Then, pinning its head to the ground by the pressure of his fore-arm, and with his hand clutching it about the face, so that its jaws could not open, he caught it in the hollow of the throat with his own teeth, working them in and flinching not, till they fastened together in the straining windpipe. A fearful struggle followed. The goblin's body heaved and wriggled, the yellow eye glared and rolled, and fœtid gasps of breath and flecks of froth oozed through its curling lips. But Jack held on, feeling as if more than his life depended on the issue; the harsh hair of the monster filled his mouth, its claws tore at his deerskin shirt, its convulsive chokings were horrible to hear; but all was as nothing compared with the fierce satisfaction that possessed Jack's soul at finding his hitherto impalpable adversary at last solidly within his grip, to be fought with like any mortal enemy. At last, with a sharp wheeze, its struggles suddenly ceased, its stiffened throat relaxed, and its body collapsed and lay still. Slowly and warily Jack unclenched his teeth, and partly raised himself; but his grisly antagonist made no movement. After a pause to recover his breath, he seized the dead thing, and dragged it to the mouth of the cavern; and there, in the transparent shadow of the cañon walls, he saw the body of no worse goblin than a huge wolf, a cross between the coyote and the grey. His first blow had broken one of its hind legs; his second had taken it behind the ear, partly stunning it; and he had finished the work with the weapons that nature gave him. He sat down upon a projecting corner of rock, leaned his cheek upon his hand, and contemplated his fallen foe in silence.

Though bleeding from several ugly scratches, and tremulous from the severity of the combat, Jack's mind was now serene and clear. The unsubstantial terror which, for several years past, had occasionally overcome him, had never until now identified itself with any material

object. It had been a terror of the soul, not to be met with any mortal weapons, springing from no intelligible source, and incalculable in its action and effects. It had appeared to Jack to put a barrier between himself and his fellow-men, allied as it was with other experiences which, though beyond the sphere of sense, were to him the most intensely real features of his life. Sometimes, in the midst of his customary avocations, the solid earth would all at once become as a shadow to him, and the fantasies of his mind would assume the aspect of substantial realities. He was never wholly deceived by these apparitions—that is, he always knew that they were imperceptible to others; but that did not prevent them from exerting an influence upon him; and he could not decide whether they indicated the opening to him of a state of existence not the less actual because physically uncognisable, or whether they were absolutely and essentially illusory.

The odd chance which had embodied the more formidable of these visions in the flesh and bones of the wolf, gave a certain relief to Jack's mind. Having definitely got the better of the wolf, it seemed not unreasonable to hope that he had also gained some advantage over the spectre which the wolf had represented. Partly from mechanical force of habit, and partly from a development of the Indian superstition that to scalp an enemy renders him spiritually as well as physically incapable of further offence, Jack took his knife from his girdle and skinned the animal. Then, throwing the hide over his arm, he set off to clamber his way out of the cañon.

An hour's ascent brought him to the summit of a lofty cluster of castellated rocks, which rose as high above the level of the surrounding country as the cañon sank below it. It was a point of outlook which he had several times visited before; it gave to his eyes an extent of range in some measure proportional to that of his imagination. Far to the north, more than a hundred miles away, rose a solitary white peak, covered with perpetual snow: a mountain which Jack knew well, for at the base of it dwelt the tribe to which Kooahi belonged, and from which, in the wild raid and battle of two years ago, he had carried her off as his special prize. She was a child then; now she was a mother. She had given Jack the tenderest happiness he had ever known; yet it was a happiness at no time free from certain reservations. She had come to him by violence and bloodshed; and moreover, he had sometimes suspected that when he was most at one with her, he was least completely himself. In binding her to himself, he had perhaps cut himself adrift from possibilities and opportunities in life which might, under other conditions, have been practicable to him. What these were Jack could have had but a vague notion. Perhaps the consideration that pressed most insidiously upon him was precisely the one to which a sentiment of loyalty would make him least willing to yield. It may be asserted that Jack was not the first man to perceive what he fancied was a divided duty. He loved this Indian girl, and she deserved his love.

But was he born to live for ever in this valley, hunting, fighting, dreaming? If so, why had he the impulse to live a wider life? The Indians had no such impulse. Kooahi had it not. Should his fate, then, be the same as theirs.

He turned and looked towards the south and west. There lay cities, and the ocean. Must they be to him for ever as if they did not exist? He loved Kooahi, and had given her rights over him which might not honourably be rescinded. But had he done so with a full realisation of the consequences? And if not, should those consequences be allowed to dominate his whole future?

Out of the bosom of his hunting-shirt he drew a heavy gold locket, which he opened. It contained the miniature of a woman's face—a face very different from Kooahi's. It was a face which Jack often had beheld in his visions; it had become to him in some sort a divine or religious symbol, as the face of the mother of God is to Roman Catholics. Whatever in life was sweet, pure, holy, beautiful, had to his mind its concentration and embodiment in these august features. He was sure that, apart from the influence which this face had exerted upon him, he would have been a very different man from what he was; he might have been an Indian in soul as well as in circumstances. But she—this nameless, ideal being—had ever been before him, beckoning him onward—he thought also upward. In some transfigured state of existence it seemed to him that he should meet and know her. To do so was the highest good he could conceive of. Whatever good—whatever happiness he had heretofore known, had seemed but a dim and imperfect foretaste of the good and happiness which his ideal was capable of bestowing upon him. Even the love of Kooahi—and herein he did not deem himself unfaithful; for, after all, the ideal woman could not be material; she did not partake of common mortality; she was in the sphere of immortals. So Jack always told himself; and yet he was conscious of a mental reservation, which practically contradicted that view; for if she were only a spiritual essence, not to be apprehended by physical senses, how was it that more than half his desire to go forth in the world was founded upon the hope of meeting her? But, on the other hand, he could not say that she was a vision until he had proved her to be something more. He never had seen her, and might never see her. He had no authority for supposing her to exist. If the pictured face were a portrait, the original must have died years ago. As for the dark-eyed little girl who had given him the locket, she was a very faint and fading figure in Jack's memory now. He had long ago ceased to think of her. His dreams of the future did not include her.

But what signified dreams of the future if he were to live and die in the valley of the Sacramento? The past was his future.

Several hours had passed away, during which Jack had remained seated on the top of the tower of granite, with his face turned to the south and west. Meanwhile the sun had set, and its latest glow had long since vanished from the snowy peak to the north. For some

while past an undertone of distant noise had sounded in Jack's ears, without his paying conscious attention to it. The noise, whatever it betokened, had now ceased. A cakea, flying below Jack's lofty seat, called sharply in the night air, as if to attract his notice. He turned round slowly.

Down below there, four or five miles away, a red glow lit up the blackness of the forest. Tongues of flame licked upwards now and then, apparently the last of a conflagration. Jack gave a glance at the stars; then looked downward again. The red glow occupied the spot where stood the lodges of the tribe with which he lived—where stood his lodge and Kooahi's.

Jack thrust the locket back in his bosom, and went leaping down the steep hillside towards his home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'Man,' declares the Persian proverb, 'is more sharp than steel, more hard than flint, more frail than roses.'

In two hours Jack had passed over the stretch of fell and forest, rock and ravine, which separated him from the Indian village. Within a hundred yards of the spot, he paused, and listened intently, his face turned towards the dull glow of the dying conflagration, seen in thin vertical streaks between the black columnar trunks of the intervening trees.

There was an empty, awful silence. Fire, and fiery passions, had raged here only a few hours before, and now this deadly stillness.

'I should have been here!' said Jack to his heart, in aching anguish and remorse. But he could not yet believe the worst. He moved forward.

He stepped upon something which yielded beneath his foot in a way that made him withdraw it and spring back. A dark figure lay along amongst the undergrowth. Jack stooped, and recognised the rigid features of an Indian who had been his companion on many a hunting expedition. An arrow had pierced his neck just beneath the hinge of the jaw bone, and he had bled to death from the artery; but apparently he had been suffered to lie undisturbed, for there was no mark on him of the tomahawk or the scalping-knife. It was probable that he had escaped observation, for the body lay at some distance from the main area of the conflict. It was already stiff and cold.

Jack went forward again, turning aside three or four times to avoid other corpses that obstructed his path. At length he stood in the centre of the little space where the lodges had been, and stared around him.

It was a ghastly spectacle. The great trees, scorched and blackened, encompassed the spot, with blasted arms raised aloft as if demanding vengeance of heaven. Every one of the lodges was burnt down, and nothing remained of them but smouldering embers. Cast about amidst these, lying over one another in heaps, were the gory and mutilated bodies of the human beings among whom the latter years of Jack's life had been passed. Many of them were partly or wholly charred by the fire. All of them had been scalped. Four or five had been bound to the trees, and there shot to death; their bodies bristled with arrows. Several women were amongst the slain, but they were mostly the old squaws; the maidens and the younger women were nowhere to be seen. Many infants were there—a sickening and heart-rending sight. Every one of these creatures Jack had known by name and character; he had seen the sun shine upon them, alive and well, that very afternoon; and now, in a moment as it were, all were dead; their dead eyes stared at him reproachfully. Surrounded by so much death, Jack felt his own life a burden and a shame.

He worked his way round the fatal circle, and passed over to the right, where his own lodge and that of his white companion had stood. To his surprise they stood there still, apparently undisturbed. For a minute or two he paused, summoning up resolution to examine them more closely. He had already seen that Kooahi was not among the heap of death behind there. Was she here?

At last he entered his lodge. It was in the condition in which he had left it. Even his banjo was standing within the entrance where he had put it before going out. But no living thing was there, nor any dead thing either. Kooahi and the papoose were not there.

He came out again, oppressed with a fresh anguish. He had prepared himself to find Kooahi dead; but neither to find her dead nor living was something he was not prepared for. His heart, over which a sort of sickly repose had crept, began to beat again tumultuously. He went into his companion's lodge, but that too was empty. He came out, and began to wander hither and thither aimlessly. Suddenly he stopped short. Before him, bound to a tree, with his arms above his head, and stripped completely naked, was a figure that he recognised by its whiteness, even before he could distinguish the features. But on drawing nearer, he perceived that the man's eyes were open, and met his own with a living, albeit feeble, glance.

'Hugh!' he cried out, with a great sob, and a rush of tears; 'Hugh!—not dead?'

'Cut this damned cord round my wrists,' replied Hugh, in a voice that was no more than a hoarse whisper, 'and get me some water.'

Jack did these things with all possible haste. Then his glance searched Hugh's face for the answer to the question he could not find words to ask.

'If you'll look in my right thigh,' said Hugh, 'you'll find an arrow-head there that I'd as lief have out of the way. Ay, that's the place—whew!—hold up a bit. You'll find my tobacco in the

pouch there. Just chew up a cud of it ready to go on the wound. Now then—out with the cussed thing! Tchee—e—um! Ah!'

The arrow had not penetrated to its full depth, but, having remained so long in the wound, the process of extraction was naturally very painful. Jack bound up the bleeding gash with the moistened tobacco leaves, and made his friend as comfortable as he could. All the while he was alert with nervous dread to hear words which would make an incalculable difference in his life. Two or three would do it. But Hugh seemed in no hurry to speak them. The suspense was torture.

'So you concluded to come round when all the fun was over?' he remarked presently. 'I began to think you was gone for good.'

'How was it?' asked Jack, huskily.

'Blessed if I can tell! we'd just turned in. I always told our fellows there'd be hell to pay some night, if they didn't keep watch. That nonsense of theirs about letting mother night take care of 'em will be the death of every Indian in the country, that don't die other ways. First thing I knew, there was a row like six score devils broke loose. I run out and got this thing in my leg. I seen the chief of the beggars—they was the same lot we went for two year ago. Well, they've got their revenge—the whole of it. There ain't one of our fellows left alive, except them they took off with 'em; and I'd rather be finished here than there. They hunted for you, Master Jack, high and low, I can tell you! You was in luck, as usual. What they'd have done with you if they'd found you is more than I can tell. They thought I was you at first, being the same colour, I suppose.'

'Hugh, tell me——'

'They was rather careful of our things, too; may be they thought we was medicine men, and not safe to meddle with. All they did to me was to string me up to the madroño and leave me for the coyotes; that blessed pet bear of yours was smelling at my legs not half an hour ago, and I made up my mind I was going off inside him. But he found something else he liked better, I suppose.'

'They weren't all killed?'

'No, no, my boy, she wasn't killed—at least, not that I know of; they didn't do it here; they took her off. What they'll do to her when they get her to their place, the devil knows! She's the chief's daughter, you know. May be they'll make an example of her to keep the other women in order—there's no telling. She didn't want to go with 'em—you could see that. But the old chief, he tied her to his mustang, neck and crop, poor gal! and she had to give in. It'll take more than you and me to get her back again, I'm thinking.'

'Manita?'

'Ah! that's more than I know. I didn't see nothing of her. No, 'tain't likely; I wouldn't look to see Manita no more, my lad. Them little kids they make no account of, these red devils. No, I take it the whole thing's done for. We've had a right fair time of it

these seven years back, and now this is the end, and we must look out for something else. I did hope it might last out my time, too; I was saying just this afternoon I was as well off as I wanted to be; but 'twas always my luck to get stirred up just when I was settled down. Well, cheer up, Jack, my boy; that's how it is in life, and you've got more life in front of you than I have by thirty years. You was wishing to see the world, and now you may see it. We'll go back to England, and I'll show you old Bideford, and the little brother I've got there—though he'll be growed up by this time, bigger than I be, like as not. He was a plucky chap; he saved my life once; though may be he'd as well have let it alone. Heigho! I've had about enough of it.'

'I must go after Kooahi,' said Jack, in a dull tone.

'Thought likely you'd be up to some such game,' returned Hugh, shaking his head. 'But just you listen here. If you go after her, you'll have to take me along—that's number one; and I ain't in no condition to travel to-night, nor to-morrow neither. Number two, supposing us come up with 'em, what are we to do against a hundred or a hundred and fifty? If my old rifle was any use, we might have a chance against a few of 'em; but it's been hanging up there this three year for want of powder, and as rusty as a coffin-nail into bargain.'

'She would be on the watch—she would come to us.'

'Not she! for two reasons. In the first place, it's two to one—I'd as well say ten to one—that she's dead at this very minute.' Jack caught his breath between his teeth and half started to his feet. 'No, no—keep cool!' Hugh went on; 'we must see our way first, whatever we do. If she ain't dead, the surest way to make her so would be for her to get any wind that we was about; they'll watch her close as wax, and the first show she makes to stir, in goes the tomahawk, and there's an end of it.'

'She will expect me,' said Jack, with his eyes on the ground.

'Well, my boy, and what if she did? She'd not expect you for ever, I'm thinking; may be not for more than a year; may be not a month. Oh! I know what women be! and I suppose Indian women ain't so greatly different from the rest. After all, you know, Jack, it's her own folks has got her now, and it won't take her so long to drop down into the old ways as it might other ways. It was a bit of a new thing living with a white man for a year or two; but she'll find good-looking chaps of her own colour before she's much older, and then she'll be thinking to herself that she'd as well be making the best of the fun so long as it's going. She'll forget you, my boy, that's what I mean to say; and to my thinking, it's the best could happen.'

Jack looked up with a blank gaze.

'Ay, the best,' repeated Hugh, nodding his head; 'and you'll say so yourself one of these days. You're not an Indian, Jack, and she's not a white—that's where the point is. She'll be better off with folks

of her own colour, and you the same; and now that luck has put you apart, the best you can do is to stay so. She wasn't up to your ways, and you wasn't down to hers; and ten years from now, when she was an old woman, you'd have wished to the devil you'd never set eyes on her. Let it go as it is, and there'll be no harm done. You've got your chance, with no blame one way nor t'other; and you won't get it so square another time, so my advice is to hook it. A man like you might come to something among white folks, but with these red devils, the better you are, the worse it is for you; it don't help you —it trips you up. And I tell you, Jack, after what I seen this night, I don't want nothing more to do with Indians, good or bad! They ain't our sort. If I have my way, I'll never go nigh one of e'm again. I'm for England, or for kingdom come! but no more redskins, if I can help it. It ain't wholesome.'

In this strain, and doubtless with excellent intentions, Hugh continued to hold forth, while the stiffened corpses round about, and the various signs of violence and ruin, silently enforced his arguments against the red men. But possibly he need not have been so eloquent. In Jack's secret consciousness there was a voice urgent on the same side. To a young man of twenty-one, that which is untried is apt to appear more desirable than anything that is known. If Jack could have been assured that Kooahi was alive, and was expecting him to rescue her, he would unquestionably have risked his life in that attempt. But in this life we are never guided by certainties, except the certainties of the past. Freedom of choice is ours in our own despite, and we choose according to our nature, not our foresight; not even according to our intellectual conviction, unless that be on nature's side. Jack had never until now contemplated the possibility of life apart from Kooahi, but the sudden fact of their separation made him reflect that it might be permanent. It is unnecessary to follow the course of Jack's reasonings. The fact that he reasoned at all is sufficient. When a man reasons with himself, he reasons for his selfishness. Unselfishness knows nothing of syllogisms; and a good man is apt to be a bad logician.

Be all that as it may, Jack had reason enough for deciding not to begin the pursuit of Kooahi that night. Hugh could hardly be left to shift for himself without effective arms, and with wolves and bears—even pet bears—about. Moreover, if Kooahi was to be rescued at all, it must be by guile and intrigue—matters which require pondering. The immediate question was, what should be done with the bodies of the slain? Burial is not among the customs of the Californian Indians; and even had it been so, it was beyond the powers of one man to dig the required number of graves in the necessarily limited time. A holocaust seemed the best way out of the difficulty. Hugh happened to possess an axe, and the forest in the vicinity was full of partially-decayed timber which burnt like touchwood. Jack went vigorously to work, glad to have something to do to distract his mind from dwelling too persistently on unwelcome subjects. He drew all

the bodies together in one spot, and built around and above them a pyramid of dry wood. The work occupied him all the rest of the night, and the sun had risen before the mighty funeral pyre was lighted. It burnt all that day and the next night, Jack feeding the flames occasionally with armfuls of fresh fuel. By the second morning nothing remained of the late comrades of the two white men but a large heap of ashes and bones. A pit was dug, and the remains were shovelled into it, and an oblong fragment of white quartz was set up over the spot. As Jack placed it there he felt that he was symbolically marking the grave of his past life, and that from it he was to go onward to new things. All the same, he neither confessed to himself nor admitted to Hugh that he had given up the purpose of following Kooahi. He would have been ashamed to admit it; for though Hugh had employed, and continued to employ, all manner of dissuasions, Jack could not divest himself of the conviction that he would suffer in his friend's estimation should he allow himself to be dissuaded. In thinking this, he perhaps rated Hugh's principles too high. Hugh was an easy-going fellow, without lofty aim or ambition, free from any bigoted consistency of conduct, and desirous chiefly to accommodate to his comfort whatever circumstances he might happen to find himself in. He was good-natured, fearless even to the extent of not fearing to shun unnecessary peril, fond of his comrades of the time being, yet not inconsolable in case of their loss; of a healthy nature and constitution, and, upon the whole, not the most salutary possible companion and mentor for a young man of imagination and sensibility. It must, however, be conceded that he had not had any special influence upon Jack either for good or evil; and the time was now at hand when his influence, such as it was, was about to be exchanged for another of a very different and more positive kind.

At the end of five days Hugh's wound—never very serious—had healed sufficiently to allow of his walking without discomfort. Walking was the only mode of progression at present available, the horses having been carried off by the hostile Indians. The question now came up for final consideration. In what direction should they betake themselves—northward or southward? Hugh voted for the former route, Jack for the latter, not without an edifying consciousness of acting against his private and secret inclinations. The fact was, he did not wish to surrender Kooahi until some obstacle had been encountered formidable enough to make discouragement definitely respectable. It was probable that such obstacles would not refuse to present themselves, and then—— But for the present, forward in the path of duty!

In the end it was agreed that they should go to the lodges of a neighbouring tribe, which had formerly been at war with the despoilers, and try to persuade them once more to take the war-path against them. This tribe lay almost directly due west of their present position, about forty miles away. The route which they must take would, therefore, lie impartially between those which they severally

advocated; and when they arrived at their intermediary destination, they would see what they would see.

So, early in the cloudless morning, they set off on the journey which was to end, for each of them, so differently from what either imagined. Hugh was in excellent spirits, the ebullience of which he was not at any pains to disguise. Nothing either permanently depressed or excessively elated this man, who had not a tithe of Jack's spiritual and mental resources, who seldom did anything from his own initiative, and whose notion of independence was to be the sport of circumstances. He could, upon occasion, have found a way to be comfortable in Siberia, or reasons to console himself for being turned out of Paradise. He had lately set before Jack good grounds for spending the rest of his days beside the Sacramento, but that did not prevent him from perceiving and pointing out the advantages of leaving it. Jack heard him talk, and thought of other things; yet he too presently began to feel a lightness of heart and an appetite for novelty and change which made him fancy that more than one nature was bound up in his individuality. Some one whom he had hitherto supposed to be himself was mourning for Kooahi; but another person was coming to the front, with a vivid and lively resemblance to Jack in all respects save a regard for that important episode in his past career. Between these rival claimants choice was embarrassing, until Jack was disposed to fall back upon his favourite position, which was that individualities are of small account. Mankind is responsible for the man, and the latter's thoughts and acts are but his particular method of disposing of the vast reservoir of forces and impulses with which he is in communication. There is probably a good deal of truth in this view, but then the disciple should be careful to use it rather to humble his personal pretensions than to excuse his private transgressions.

Towards the afternoon the travellers, who had never allowed themselves to stray far from the banks of the stream which had watered their lodges, came upon an open tract, a couple of miles in length by half a mile in breadth, which extended nearly east and west, and at one side of which a rocky hill, with a fringe of pines along its summit, rose from the left margin of the river. A little way down, the river made a sharp bend, and the small angle of land thus produced had a group of trees upon it, which seemed to invite to repose beneath their shadow. Hugh pointed this out to his companion.

'We've done a good ten miles, my boy,' said he; 'and a very tidy distance too, with such going as we've had, let alone the broiling of that sun. Ah, give me England for coolness and comfort, and Devonshire of all places in England. You shall see it, Jack; and you and I and Tom, my brother, will have a bit of fun together. Poor Tom! I shall be right glad to see him again. Well, all in good time: what I need now is a bellyful of venison and acorn-bread, and a drink. Ah, we'll have something better than water to drink in

England! Here we are: you start a fire, whilst I go down the bank and fetch the water. Hullo! look at that.'

He pointed to some traces on the sandy margin of the stream which had apparently been made not long before. They entered the water, and seemed to be continued on the other side. Hugh and Jack examined them narrowly.

'No four-footed beast made that,' remarked Hugh at length.

'No Indian, either,' said Jack.

'You're right, my boy,' rejoined the other; 'that's the print of a white man's foot. All the better! All white men are good company in this part of the world. May be we'll run across 'em, yet. It couldn't have been more than yesterday they was here. Like as not they've pitched their camp somewheres not far off. If I had some powder, now, I'd fire 'em a signal out of my old rifle.'

'What could they be doing here?' said Jack.

'What are we doing, if you come to that? The time will come, my boy, when this country will be as full of white folks as it is of pine-trees.'

'Not while we are alive,' Jack answered, sagaciously.

'I don't know that, neither. If there's one thing I can't think of, it is of the time when I shall stop living. 'Tis my idea that dying is a humbug; you're bound to go on, somehow and somewheres. If you was to cut my throat this minute, it wouldn't bother me much, except for the inconvenience of changing round a bit. I should turn up all right again, though may be where you couldn't get at me.'

'I'd rather try cutting my own,' returned Jack; but whether he meant to imply that his prospects of immortality were more encouraging than Hugh's, or something else, he did not have time to explain.

For as he spoke he looked upwards across the river, and his eyes rested on the rocky crest of the opposite bluff, which was about a hundred and fifty yards distant. All at once a puff of white smoke appeared above the crest, looking fresh and pretty in the bright sunshine. A moment or two later a sound was heard such as a man might make by smiting his palms together; but it was followed by a rolling echo, which somehow seemed louder than it ought to have been.

At the same time, and greatly to Jack's surprise, Hugh, who was just stooping to dip up some water, uttered a faint shriek, staggered back, raised himself to his full height, and then fell heavily against the bank. There he drew up his knees, straightened them again convulsively, and turned partly over on his side, coughing slightly, and showing blood on his lips.

Jack, in his first bewilderment, hit upon the idea that his companion had been bitten by a snake. He sprang forward, his mind set upon killing the reptile before it should do further damage.

'Stand back—they're shooting!' said Hugh, with a gasp.

Before the words were uttered, that sharp, rolling echo was again

reflected from the cliffs. Jack felt himself violently struck in the left ankle; a sensation of burning heat, accompanied by numbness, followed. He did not think himself much hurt; but he could not stand. He sat down, and then perceived that his moccasin was full of blood. He looked round at Hugh, whose face, deadly pale, was bent over towards the ground. Blood was frothing from his mouth; he had torn open his shirt, disclosing a small hole in the middle of his breast, at which, every time he breathed, there was a bubbling of blood.

Jack looked again at the cliff. But close at hand, on the opposite brink of the river, two men were standing, with rifles in their hands. They were white men. One was a good deal shorter than the other, but very broad-shouldered and sturdy, with a red beard and bright blue eyes, and broad, prominent cheek-bones. He had a bold and smiling aspect, as if he considered the affair rather a joke. The other man had a much less taking expression, though his countenance was the comelier of the two; he had a lowering and evasive air, as if he had done something unmanly; and he kept a little behind the other, and moved with a sort of deference to him. The skin of his face was pallid and unhealthy, and his eyes were shifty and dull.

After Jack and the red-bearded man had exchanged looks for a moment or two, the latter stepped into the stream and waded across. Arrived on the hither bank, he glanced at Jack's foot, and then went up to Hugh, and fixed his eyes upon him. All at once he knelt down beside him, put his hand upon his shoulder, and said in a very soft and winning voice,

'Why, Hugh, old boy—Hugh Berne! Is this you?'

The dying man appeared to recognise the voice. He raised his heavy eyes till they met the other's. Something like a smile seemed to twitch beneath his brown beard.

'Here's—a—rum go!' he whispered. Then a fit of coughing seized him. The red-bearded man put an arm round him, and held him up. When the fit of coughing was over, Hugh's head hung down. He had gone where mortal man could not get at him.

The other laid him down very gently, as a father might lay down his sleeping child. His expression was so compassionate as to make Jack fancy that there were tears in his eyes; but in this he may have been mistaken. After a little while, the man got to his feet and turned to his companion on the other side of the stream. His face was now stern and his tone peremptory.

'Come here, Tom,' he said; 'come over here, and see what you've done!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

In which it is argued that a man who is shot does better to die than to live; and Bryan explains the uses of the precious metals.

THE man called Tom came across at once. He looked about furtively, but did not seem to know what he had been summoned for. 'What be it, sir?' he asked at length.

'Do you see that dead body?' returned the other.

'Yes, sir, a' see it.'

'That's the man you shot.'

'Well, sir?'

'Do you recognise him?'

'Can't say a' do, sir.'

But as he said it, he looked again: something in the aspect of the corpse riveted his attention. The red-bearded man, standing aside, watched him closely. The rifle slipped from Tom's hand without his seeming to perceive it; he continued to stare at the dead face, while his arms hung loosely at his sides, the fingers moving aimlessly.

'What's come to me!' he said, in a thin, muttering voice. ''E looks so like my brother—Hugh, my brother. A' told yer 'bout Hugh. A'd most say that was him.'

'It is he; and you've killed him,' said the red-bearded man.

'No, no, no!' cried Tom, his voice rising to a shriek at the last word. Then he was silent, and stood as motionless as a statue.

'Well,' said the other, breaking the silence at last with a certain impatience, 'what are you going to do?'

'A'm thinkin',' returned Tom slowly: 'let me be—a'm thinkin'. Hugh's dead—and that's him—and 'twas I done it.' Here he came to another pause of some length; at the end of which he looked round at the man with the red beard, who returned the look steadfastly.

'And 'twas you bade me do it, Mr. Bryan,' said Tom, finally, with singular quietness. Then he burst out in a giggling laugh, patting his thighs with his hands. ''Twas you bade me do it,' he repeated; 'and his blood is on your head. You done a good lot o' things, Mr. Bryan; but you never made a man kill his own brother before—he, he, he!'

The other leant on his rifle, crossed one foot over the other, and drew down his red eyebrows. 'You have a revolver in your belt,' he said, 'why don't you use it?'

But Tom only laughed again, and turned away.

Jack's foot had by this time begun to pain him so much that his senses were a little confused; yet it was very clear to him that he hated the man called Tom, especially since he had laughed; and that

he felt a decided liking for the red-bearded man, in spite of the rather unceremonious manner in which he had introduced himself. He was evidently as brave, strong, and straightforward, as Tom was the opposite of those qualities. But meanwhile, there lay his friend of the last seven years, dead; and himself perhaps maimed for life. This was a great deal to have happened in three or four minutes. It was hard to realise. At this moment Jack fell into one of his visionary states; nothing seemed real; even his pain seemed something else, though still something very disagreeable. Whatever it was, Jack had no longer any personal concern in it. It was only another phase of the evil that had extinguished Hugh. The two men before him were two opposing forces, good and bad. He saw them as such, and only incidentally as persons. They were not responsible—they were merely representative and instrumental. All that had occurred was as if it had been foreseen and inevitable, or as if it had taken place long before. Surely the red-bearded man was but repeating a question which he had asked ages ago, when he said in a kindly, but brisk tone—

'Who are you, young man?'

And Jack was only rehearsing an old story when he replied—

'My name is Jack. Hugh and I were friends. We lived together with the Indians seven years.'

'He was my friend too. We went round the world together.'

To this Jack's body responded by a groan. Jack himself was meanwhile thinking that it was not in the least surprising what the speaker had said, and that to have assisted at Hugh's murder was in some way the most natural sequel to having accompanied him round the world. Here the body groaned again, and Jack retired from it still further. In fact, an ordinary observer would have said that he had become faint from loss of blood; but ordinary observers repeat phrases and are led by appearances.

It must be admitted, however, that Jack retained no definite recollection of the progress of events for some indefinite time after this. When he arrived once more at the point of self-identification, he was lying on his back on a buffalo skin, with the canvas of a tent sloping up pyramid-wise over his face. Some one was humming an air in a low, pleasant voice, outside the tent door. Jack raised himself on his elbow to look about him, in doing which he became aware that his left leg was stiff and sore, and that his foot and ankle were bound up in folds of blood-stained linen. His first thought was that Hugh must have done this kindness for him. But then he remembered that, unless he had dreamed very vividly, Hugh was dead. In his weak physical state, this fact did not cause him any activity of grief; he contemplated it calmly, and with a sort of disinterested sadness. Hugh dead! After all, though death must always be a solemn thing, it was probably not grievous to those who had been through it, and its effects were certainly exaggerated. The figure of Hugh was just as distinct to Jack's mind's eye as it had ever been:

and if he had not ceased to exist to Jack, all the more must he continue to exist to himself. But Jack would not see him, grasp him, speak with him again—there was no denying that. And that was death. Yes, it was an overrated matter; yet, rightly regarded, possessed the beauty of that which is mysterious; and the pathos which belongs to the dealings of an inscrutable power with puny, ignorant man. To struggle, to yield, to vanish, and not to know—that was life and death. There was something else behind, however, and beyond as well; and an understanding of this something would perhaps cause death to appear but as the turning of an obscure lane, short and crooked, into the interminable splendours of a mighty highway. It was possibly discreditable, but undoubtedly characteristic of Jack to be indulging in such vague speculations as the above, when he ought to have been wondering why he and Hugh had been attacked, and planning revenge on Hugh's murderers. But poor Jack had lived so much out of the way of civilisation, that not only was he sometimes ignorant of what sentiment was conventionally proper to a given set of circumstances, but, also, he occasionally allowed himself to feel what was altogether incongruous and unexpected. And this history is not an organism of logical deductions founded upon plausible hypotheses, but a plain and helpless record of facts.

At last the person who had been humming the air came into the tent. He was the red-bearded man. He looked at Jack and nodded.

'Getting on?' he inquired.

Jack intimated, by a look, that he was getting on. His Indian associations had disaccustomed him to redundancy of speech.

'Luckily, I was able to get that confounded bullet of mine out of your ankle-joint,' the other continued. 'But I'm afraid a bit of the bone has been shot away, and that you'll go stiff for some time to come. But that's better than getting it through the heart—eh? That clumsy blackguard Tom, instead of doing as I told him, and winging his man, killed him—and killed his own brother. It serves him right, except that poor Hugh was a dear friend of mine as well as yours. We parted two or three years ago in—well, no matter.'

'Panama,' said Jack.

'Oho! then he's told you our adventures? You've heard of his friend Bryan?'

'You saved the man from the shark.'

'Those were fine times. Where did you meet him?'

Jack mentioned the place and circumstances of their first encounter; and, in reply to other questions, gave some account of their wanderings and life since then.

'Poor Hugh! I wish he were alive again——but when a man's time comes, he must die, and *if* he doesn't die of himself, some one must help him to it. I always have the devil's luck with my friends. It's our loss, not Hugh's. It never hurts a man to kill him—it's the other way. This is a country, Mr. Jack, in which a fellow takes

his life in his hand; you're obliged to shoot first and ask questions afterwards. Do you know why we shot you?'

Jack shook his head.

'And yet you've lived here seven years! Do you know that within a year or two from now—I might almost dare say within a month or two—there'll be a thousand men about this very place we're in? and thousands more all over the country?'

'White men?'

'Not red men, at all events! except blood-red, perhaps,' returned Bryan, with a boyish little laugh, that made Jack like him in spite of the grimness of the jest. 'Men with pickaxes and spades and——you don't know what I'm driving at?'

Jack shook his head again.

'Well, you're as good as an Indian! I should have thought Hugh, though—— well, I'll tell you. It's a big secret, Mr. Jack; such a big one that we're obliged to shoot a man sooner than let him find it out. But I owe you something for Hugh's sake; besides, you won't be able to travel much for a while yet; and there's enough for three, to say the least of it. Why, Jack, in years to come I shall be called the Second Columbus of America. He only found the country; but I found the—open your eyes now! Look here!'

He had lifted up some skins in a corner of the tent, and now brought forward an earthen pan about a foot in diameter and six inches deep; such a pan as Jack, in days gone by, had seen Deborah make bread in. It now contained nothing apparently so useful as bread; but a great number of little crooked lumps of a yellow substance, of various sizes, from bits no larger than a pea to fragments as big as a child's fist. The bowl was more than full of them, and was evidently very heavy.

Jack cast a look at them, and said, 'I've seen things like that before. The Indians use them to make bracelets of. They look prettier when they're beaten out.'

Bryan scrutinised the speaker's face closely, with a smile on his own face that was not so frank and unconstrained as usual. But Jack had no thought behind, and his eyes were clear of guile. Bryan, at length, nodded his head, shrugged his shoulders, and put the bowl down on the ground.

'This is as good as a story-book,' he observed. 'I once read in some story-book, by the way, about some enchanted treasure or other, which had a great deal of celebrity until some one was found who wouldn't have it as a gift; and then it was discovered to have been only a handful of chaff from the beginning. You're either a very cool hand, Mr. Jack, or——I fancy you're just what you appear. You know what this stuff is called, I suppose.'

'It's a sort of gold, isn't it?'

'Yes; a pretty good sort; good enough to buy sovereigns at par, to say the least of it. So they use it for bracelets, do they? Anything else?'

'I suppose it might be used for other things,' said Jack, who felt very little interest in the subject, but did not wish to appear ignorant. 'What shall you use it for?'

'It doesn't look as if it could do much, does it? and yet it's the greatest miracle-worker in the world. I have only to say the word, and these yellow lumps would build me a palace on this spot where we are talking, surround it with beautiful gardens, and make a carriage-road from here to San Francisco. It would get me servants, horses, and carriages; it would bring men and women from the ends of the earth, to kneel on my front doorstep. Or, if I chose, it would carry me all over the world, and wherever I went, I should meet with welcome, and good dinners, and affectionate friends; and everybody would be glad to have me come, and sorry when I went away. I could compel nations to make wars, or to stop them; I could give laws to kings and queens, marry an empress, or dethrone a sultan. I could fill starving folks with roast beef and ale, or dress the naked in wool and silk, or send the aristocracy to beg in the streets. I could discover all the secrets of nature, bring the moon down to the earth, sit down in England and converse with people in Australia, join the Pacific to the Atlantic, and the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, throw a bridge across the English Channel, hang my hat on the North Pole, walk on the bottom of the sea, transform the Sahara into an African Hyde Park, with black swans and nursery-maids; or, if I wanted easier work, I could turn chastity into lewdness, and honesty into knavery; I could make wives poison their husbands, and children cut their parents' throats; I could set London on fire, and blow up St. Peter's at Rome; in short, my dear sir, I could do everything with the help of these yellow lumps, and others like them, except make a woman love me, or prolong my life a moment beyond the time fate has ordained, or do or say or think a single thing that has not been predestined from the beginning of the world, or alter in the smallest degree the predetermined course of human affairs. I can do everything except anything that is really worth doing; and now can you explain what it is that gives this yellow stuff such remarkable powers?'

'No,' said Jack, who had listened to this imaginative flight with quite as much attention as it deserved.

'You can't? Neither can I. It is of no earthly use except to make bracelets, as you said. You might starve to a skeleton or freeze to an icicle with a mountain of it. A mountain of it can't make you one hair's breadth the happier or the wretcheder. Its whole value—such as it is—lies in a thought; and if, to-morrow morning, mankind were to wake up with that thought changed or forgotten, there'd be no more rich or poor on the face of the earth, and heaven knows what would become of us all.'

'You mean money—buying things,' said the sagacious Jack, who now remembered some dimly apprehended discourse about dollars and cents, which he had heard in his youth. But it is probable that he

had never possessed either one of those coins in the whole course of his life. Neither had he ever studied the problem of the precious metals from the philosophical point of view; and it cannot be said that Bryan's disquisition had done much to enlighten him on the subject. It had, however, given him a certain impression of Bryan which that gentleman might have been complimented to hear. Bryan appeared to him quite a novel and unprecedented specimen of human nature. He was a very different creature from Mossy Jakes, and from Hugh. Hugh had indeed spoken at great length about his own adventures, but he had done so from the subjective standpoint; so that Jack had learnt all that Hugh did and said in any given set of circumstances, but had never gained any comprehensive view of the circumstances themselves. But here was a man who saw things in the mass, and brought their ends together as it were; who was not distracted by particulars; who had drawn conclusions from what he had known, and made these conclusions into a touchstone to try the value of the untried withal; who spoke of mankind as one who had taken the measure of its greatness and littleness, its depth and shallowness; a man who could put Jack *en rapport* with all that vast realm of wonder, the thought of which had so often kindled his imagination and provoked his ignorance. Was he a good man or an evil? Jack knew not the meaning of those terms. He knew nothing of conventional codes of morality. He knew that to lie, to be afraid, to take human life, were acts which brought disquiet of mind; but he had never asked himself wherefore. He had never heard that morality consists in not being found out. He deemed this new man good, because he embodied so much that was desirable. By his face, by his voice, by the way he stood and moved, Jack saw that this man had power. He had blindly longed for the world, and suddenly the world had met him face to face. The contact excited and exhilarated him. The world would turn out to be all and more than all he had anticipated. Jack felt in himself the awakening of an inexhaustible appetite for it. The past dwindled to a point—to nothing; from to-day everything was to begin. No fairy prince in a nursery tale ever penetrated into the enchanted valley with a warmer flush of hope and exultation than that with which Jack confronted the unknown career before him. Bryan was more than good—he was divine; he symbolised the rich and fathomless human nature in which Jack had always instinctively believed, the universal pulse of which he had felt dimly beating in his own breast, the light and shade, the colour and multiplicity of which he had vaguely prefigured in his pale untutored musings. So Jack loved Bryan with the unquestioning, uncalculating enthusiasm of one who ascribes all gifts to him who has given a glimpse of one or two; and with the boundless gratitude of one who should suppose that the man who first showed him the heavens was the creator of them. Such a sentiment is, as a rule, more often found in women than in men; but wherever it is, it is beautiful; and it is not, perhaps, common enough to be unnoticeable.

Of course I do not mean to say that all the above-mentioned emotions were aroused in Jack's soul by the ten minutes' discourse with which Bryan had favoured him. But the germ was planted there, which afterwards, and rapidly, expanded and blossomed in full luxuriance. In the course of a few days Jack's whole heart and belief were with his new friend. And not having learnt the prudent art of disguising friendly sentiments lest advantage be taken of them, he incontinently rayed out upon Bryan all the sunniness and perfume which were in him, and which he had lavished upon no man before. Bryan felt it; it interested him and set him thinking. Obvious and material interests were not the only ones which had attraction for him. He recognised the charm and potency of enjoyments at which a less broad-based personage would have turned up his nose. He began to conceive a scheme which promised well and was not hackneyed; and which admirably suited his peculiar humour. Meanwhile he took excellent care of his patient. He was something of a surgeon by nature; his influence was soothing, his touch accurate and gentle; his spirits, when he chose them to be so, unflagging. Jack was soon able to limp about on an improvised crutch; and his own untarnished constitution helped him on. He was able to be continually in Bryan's company, and to assist him in some of his gold-getting operations. Gold getting was not an operation which interested him in itself, but he allowed Bryan's interest to be sympathetically engrafted on him. A man may become prodigiously excited over the search for a four-leaved clover. Jack soon learnt how to distinguish between lucky days and unlucky ones; how to rejoice at a big find, and to be disgusted at blank draws. Tom worked with them, but was not in their company. Jack had never lost the aversion for him which he had conceived on the first day. Tom had the figure of a man without possessing the spirit of one. He had slain his own brother, without even (so far as Jack knew) feeling any natural remorse for it; and he had tried to throw the odium of the deed upon Bryan. When Bryan had thereupon called upon him to make good his accusation with his revolver, Tom had slunk away, tacitly acknowledging his falsehood. His behaviour, in general, was whining, subservient, and listless. He trembled at a glance of Bryan's, though Bryan never offered him violence; he obeyed his lightest word, yet his obedience sprang from no affection, and was marked by no intelligence. The only occasions when he showed alacrity or expressed pleasure were when Bryan gave him leave to drink whisky; he would then go into his tent and blasphemously carouse himself to sleep. From such a character as this Jack held instinctively aloof; he regarded it as he would a noxious plant or offensive carrion. He never thought of inquiring what had made Tom what he was; it was natural to assume that he had never been anything different. He may have wondered how Bryan could bring himself to have anything to do with such a fellow; but, if so, he would have answered himself by assuming that his friend's motive

must be charitable and compassionate. Tom, on his part, never attempted to hold communication with Jack, and if addressed, answered only with a stare. In fact, Tom seldom spoke at all, except in semi-articulate monologues to himself; and Bryan gave him his orders more by signs than by words. He was a sort of Caliban in the other's Setebos.

One evening, after the day's work was over, Bryan filled his tobacco-pipe and flung himself down in front of the tent door, where Jack also was reclining. The yield of the mine had on this occasion been unusually rich.

'A wise man says that enough is as good as a feast,' remarked Bryan. 'What say you, my noble Jack?'

'It might be,' Jack replied. 'But enough of a thing you don't like is not as good as a feast; a feast is something good, even if you haven't enough.'

'That indicates a philological discrimination in you which I have already had occasion to admire; some day you must give me the details of your early education. But the point is—do you know how much gold we've got?'

'A good many bowls full, I should think.'

'Well, about ten thousand pounds worth—rather more than less. We might keep on and get a million; but what's the use? We have spent a year over it—at least I have; and there are not many things worth spending more than a year on. I have satisfied my ambition. I have proved that California is a gold country, and I've had the first pickings. In another year the fun would begin to get stale. True wisdom spares the bloom of the peach. Now we may have the pleasure of spending gold that has been touched by no fingers but our own. With care, it may last two years, and that's more than long enough. Would you like to go with me to Europe, Jack?'

'Yes,' said Jack, in his customary low tone, but with more emphasis than if he had shouted the word at the top of his voice.

'By the way, where were you going when—a—we met?'

The colour mounted into Jack's face. His mind, of late, had been so thronged with new thoughts and sensations that, for all he could assert to the contrary, he had forgotten Kooahi. He had never mentioned her to Bryan. Should he mention her now, and take his leave of Bryan, and go back to seek her? Jack could only feel that to take such a course was a violent impossibility. In the first place he was a cripple. In the second place—no, it was no use enumerating the objections; the thing was not to be thought of. In a few seconds Jack had said, 'I cannot tell,' and felt that the die was cast. But a shadow fell upon him; and he glanced northward, where a great snow-peak lifted itself above the dark horizon. Was Kooahi there?

'So much the better,' said Bryan, who had been removing an obstruction in his pipe, and had not noticed Jack's change of countenance. 'Since you have no other engagement, as the young gentlemen say to the young ladies at the ball, may I have the honour?

Now, I'll tell you what I think of doing. I've taken a great fancy to you; I came so near killing you that I feel as if I'd saved your life. I haven't got many friends; people at home know too much about me, and that takes the bloom off friendship, sometimes. But I and the old world are both equally new to you, and you can get a good deal of fun out of us, for a while. And inasmuch as it is more blessed to give than to receive, I shall get still more fun out of you. You shall see Europe and the kingdoms thereof under my auspices. Will that please you?'

'Yes,' said Jack.

'I wonder how long you will keep to your monosyllables, after you get there! Now, Jack, whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. I intend that you shall not only receive a sensation yourself, but create one. I mean to make you a very distinguished personage. You are to be the fashion. Women are to go mad after you; men are to admire and envy you. To do you justice, you won't need much help from me; you've got as much of your own as nature generally bestows on a man; but whatever I can give you, you shall have into the bargain. I have been wondering, ever since I came to this place, what I should spend my gold for after I'd got it. I have had gold and spent it before now. To do the same things twice over is waste of time. But you come and solve my difficulty like the godsend that you are. I shall spend my ten thousand on you. You shall have everything that ten thousand pounds can get you. In fact, you shall have a great deal more; for a man from the new world with gold in his pocket is always a millionaire in popular belief, and has credit in proportion. You don't understand all that now—but never mind. You shall have a *début* such as no young heir of the nobility need be dissatisfied with. You might be introduced as a Mexican prince—but we'll arrange the details as we go on. You can take your hints from me at the start, you know, and soon enough you'll twig the shape of things for yourself. I shouldn't be surprised if in six months you married an English countess or a Russian princess. By Jupiter, this is the best investment I ever made! I shall renew my youth in you, Jack!'

'Hadn't I better find some gold for myself?' Jack inquired.

'And spoil all my pleasure? I don't deny my selfishness, Jack; but I'm too old to change now; and it would be friendly of you to indulge me a bit.'

Bryan certainly knew how to do a graceful act gracefully. Nay, was he not exhibiting a self-abnegation considerably beyond what was involved in giving away his ten thousand pounds? For Jack could have no idea of the value of money, nor therefore of the real extent of his obligation; so that Bryan was denying himself even that claim upon his beneficiary's gratitude which he might legitimately hope to enjoy. I can only say that he was perfectly sincere in his offer; and if he saw elements in it at present invisible to other eyes, that is his own affair. Meanwhile there is no ground for supposing that it was not just as handsome as it looked.

Jack, it is needless to say, had no misgivings, at least upon that score. He may have thought that his luck was too great to be safe; though probably he had not been educated up to that morbid refinement of distrust in Providence. Perhaps he told himself it was more than he deserved—that his thoughts and movements ought to be directed in quite another direction; but if so, he kept his disquietude to himself. He lent his aid to the preparations that were immediately made for departure, and gazed northward but seldom.

Tom received the new orders without perceptible emotion. But on more than one occasion Jack detected the man watching him with an odd, half-grinning expression which he did not like. He would not trouble himself, however, to investigate the meaning of the fellow's behaviour. He began to feel like a giant, and chafed with joyful impatience to prove his strength. On the second day the party started westward.

CHAPTER XXV.

In which Jack and Bryan assist at a grand wild beast show, and discuss certain abstract philosophical questions.—Jack's appearance in a new character.

THE two comrades, with Tom Berne in attendance, shaped their course for San Francisco; for it was Bryan's purpose to make for England by way of the Pacific instead of the Atlantic; and in those days of no railroads the route selected was no doubt less perilous and possibly quicker than the other. Moreover, Bryan liked to put a girdle round the earth, and liked it none the less for having done it once before; and as for Jack, he was well content to follow his new friend's advice and guidance. So they rode onward over hill and dale, through forest and cañon and along the ridges of the mountain range; not hastening themselves unduly, and neglecting no fair chance of hunting or adventure; though Jack, owing to the state of his ankle, was unable to bear his full part in the latter diversions. One day they came upon traces of buffalo; and leaving their horses tethered at the noon camping ground they—that is, Jack and Bryan—followed these traces for a mile or so due southward. In an open space extending from the subsidence of a low spur of the hills they saw a belt of timber, which seemed to surround an interior plot of ground not more than an acre or two in area. As they looked from the cover of the bushes and tall grass that environed them, they perceived three buffalo bulls pass along the side of this belt, and enter it by a trail with which they were apparently familiar. Doubtless there was a spring of water within. The spot was not more than two hundred yards distant. The two friends at once began to advance, Bryan (who alone carried arms) hoping to get a shot at the bulls while they were drinking. Jack followed, limping cleverly along with the help of his

two cross-handled staves, in the use of which he had become expert.

In five minutes they were at the confines of the timber-belt, and could hear the snortings and mutterings of the bulls within. Cautiously picking their way from tree to tree, they soon came in sight of the group, who were gambolling ponderously about, shaking their vast heads, and occasionally crashing their shaggy fronts together in mock combat, though the impact seemed heavy enough to demolish a stone wall or bear down an oak tree. One of the bulls was much larger than the others—a monster some seven feet in height from hump to hoof, and who, as he stood knee-deep in the grass, with his head hanging low, looked not unlike a minor reproduction of one of the steep pine-clad hills that abounded in this region. He did not take part in the play of the two younger bulls.

'That's the fellow for me,' muttered Bryan, as he cocked his rifle, 'though it doesn't seem as if anything less than a battery of artillery could make him look round. However, if he'll only set a little more broadside on——'

'Wait a moment,' said Jack. 'What a good time they're having! It's a pity to interrupt them. That old fellow might live twenty years if you'd let him alone.'

'As well say there'd be no night if the sun didn't set. His hour has come. Fate will have its way. If I didn't shoot him, he would die of heart disease in the next minute—if nothing else finished him. We are puppets, Jack, pulled by strings we don't see. Good-bye, bull!'

He raised his rifle to his face. Suddenly Jack laid his hand on his arm, at the same time pointing to the opposite side of the glade. Bryan, after glancing in that direction, immediately lowered his rifle and drew back a little within the cover of the trees.

On no stage built by human hands was ever represented a scene more brutally impressive than this. Crushing through the underbush opposite came straight onward a gigantic creature. He was not so tall as the great bull, but his body was longer, and moulded in every part in forms of irresistible and massive power. He was covered all over with deep coarse fur of a peculiar hue, neither brown nor black, and grizzled here and there as if from age; yet the animal was manifestly in the prime of life and condition. On he came, with a long, lunging stride, not turning away from any obstacle, but shouldering all aside, as a vessel plunges through the waves. His head, seen from in front, was of immense breadth, with small deep-set eyes and short ears. There were long claws on his feet, and his thick fore-legs seemed crooked with strength. Nature has created no beast that carried the impression of brutal, immeasurable force to such a pitch as the grizzly bear of North America. He looks like a relic of the antediluvian age.

'I should like to spend a week with him,' Bryan observed. 'No make-believe there! It would be as good as a bout at the Siege of Troy.'

Jack gazed intently and said nothing.

The three bulls had held themselves alert from the moment of the grizzly's appearance, and at first seemed disposed to gallop off; they wheeled about, beating the turf with their hoofs and sticking out their tails; but finally faced round again, determined to put a bold front upon the business. They stood with their horns towards the foe, with a small space separating each from the other; the old bull being on the left of the line of battle. Their attitude was one of defence, and they were evidently in some uncertainty how to act; had any cows been present, they might have behaved differently.

There was no hesitation or uncertainty in the action of the grizzly. He came on at a pace which was much swifter than it seemed, uttering short growls, and evidently desirous to get to close quarters with the least possible delay. And, in fact, he was amongst the buffalos almost immediately. As it happened, one of the smaller bulls to the right was the nearest of the three to him; as he advanced upon it, it shook its horns and made a dive at him; he reared partly up, avoiding the impact of the charge, laid his right paw on the creature's shoulder, and brought the left down across the middle of its back with a blow like the fall of a pile-driver. That mighty blow snapped the buffalo's spine in twain with a sickening crash that was plainly audible to the two human spectators. The animal fell on its knees and then rolled over, kicked out with its hoofs twice or thrice convulsively, and was dead.

Jack drew his breath between his teeth with a sharp sound. Bryan said—

'It's worth while creating an animal that can do that!'

The bear strode across the body of the fallen bull, growling with ire and eagerness to demolish the second likewise. The latter retreated a little before his onset; and, by keeping its head towards its antagonist, contrived for a few moments to parry the bear's attempt to take it in the flank. But after an effort or two the bear got its vast arms, one over the buffalo's shoulder, the other round its throat, and, with a twist that hardly seemed to tax his strength, hurled it over sideways, dislocating its neck as it went. The luckless animal still struggled a little, but a blow or two from the terrible paw of its conqueror quieted it for ever.

The grizzly was now of the opinion that he had laid in a stock of beef sufficient for his immediate needs; so, without noticing the third bull, he laid hold of his last victim by the hide at the back of the neck and began dragging it off towards the trees.

But the big bull was not content to let the tournament end here. He was conscious of his own strength, and thought it due to his reputation to make an example of the aggressor. Accordingly, with a snort and a rush, he charged headlong upon the retiring grizzly. The chance was a fair one, the enemy's side being turned full towards him, and his attention occupied with his booty. The bull's horns struck him below and behind the ribs, just as the grizzly dropped his prey

and wheeled round upon his new antagonist with an ominous growl. But the great robber was an instant too late. The bull threw up his head with a jerk, ripping open the bear's body from the ribs to the end of the belly, lifting his hind quarters from the ground, and hurling him over and falling on him. Then, for a few moments, there was an indescribable snarling and struggling, in which it was impossible to distinguish exactly what was being done. When the struggle ended, neither combatant rose. The bull was evidently dead; was the bear sucking his blood? The spectators looked on for a short time in doubt. There was no movement—not so much as a tremor. The four great bodies lay in a group, almost touching one another. Less than five minutes had passed since the grizzly first broke his way through the belt of woodland.

Jack was the first to move forward. He made his way across the intervening space, and stood amidst the fallen combatants; Bryan followed him, with his rifle still cocked. But it needed but a glance to show that all four were dead. The fight had been as conclusive as it was short and fierce. These wild and savage champions, unconscious of spectators, and animated by the most elementary impulses, had heartily and effectively made an end of one another. Without pity, policy, or remorse, they had brought to a final end the only life they had. It was a strange spectacle. Who was to blame for it?

'Didn't I tell you that fate would have its own?' said Bryan at length, smiling.

'Did they understand what they were doing?' said Jack, interrogating himself rather than his companion. 'They fought like men.'

'Fighting is not an intellectual amusement; if it were, it would have stopped ages ago,' Bryan answered. 'But I have felt like a grizzly bear or a buffalo sometimes, and liked the feeling. That may be the reason why buffalos and grizzlies exist. After all, they do their business better than our imitation of it. If we were honest, we should revive the Coliseum.'

'If I killed a man,' observed Jack, 'I should feel sorry afterwards. But wolves and grizzlies never are.'

'Civilisation is sophisticated, and you seem to have caught the taint,' said Bryan, 'though I don't know where you could have got it from. There is a thing called morality, Jack. It is a lot of rules devised by society for its own protection. You mustn't be caught stealing, murdering, committing adultery, or bearing false witness, on pain of social anathema. But society may do all these things to you, because you can't prevent it. If you submit to these rules, you are a virtuous citizen, and may be received in drawing-rooms. If you don't, it's hanging or imprisonment. Submission is called right; rebellion wrong. Now, the absurdity is here: every man who is tempted to do these forbidden things, yields to the temptation in his mind. If he doesn't also yield bodily, it's because he's afraid of society. But society, which professes to be so solicitous about your virtue, has no objection to your being a devil at heart, if only you

remain angelic outwardly. The consequence is that the biggest devils are always persons of the highest social morality. I tell you this as something you will find it useful to remember when you get to London.'

'Why do we like to do these forbidden things?' inquired Jack.

'Partly because they are forbidden; but chiefly because they are in human nature. There they are, and we didn't put them there.'

'Who did?'

'I don't know. Ask the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Pope.'

'If everybody did these things, what would happen?'

'The same that happens to animals, I suppose. They break the decalogue every day of their lives, and are none the worse for it. We should all go to heaven.'

'Do animals go to heaven?'

'They say not.'

'Then why should we go if we did like animals?'

'Well, I'm not a missionary,' said Bryan, laughing. 'Besides, you would nonplus the Archbishop.'

'I have thought about these things myself,' Jack remarked. 'I wondered why I should be sorry to kill a man. Have you ever done the forbidden things?'

'Yes,' said Bryan, after a pause. 'Yes, I am a shade better than the moralists. I do the things; only I don't let it be known—that's my weakness.'

'If you knew that you would become a grizzly if you did like one, would you do like one?' Jack pursued with Indian gravity.

'You must cure yourself of this interrogative habit,' said Bryan, casting an arch glance at his interlocutor. 'It's all very well here, in the midst of the primeval wilderness, sitting on the hump of a dead bison; but it would never do in Mayfair.'

'We are different from animals,' Jack persisted; 'and the difference must be that we can be sorry. And we ought not to do what makes us sorry; so we ought not to do the forbidden things, even though society says we must not do them.'

'Well done, Jack; you are epigrammatic. But you must admit we want to do them; and why do we want to, if we ought not to? And how are you better for not doing the thing you want to do?'

'When I want to do them I am not so much like myself as when I don't want to do them; so I ought to remember that, when I do want to do them,' said Jack, who was not sufficiently civilised to be able to express himself gracefully on abstract topics. 'And perhaps the reason I want to do them is to remind me that I am a man, and can say "no."'

'Then you think there's more than one of you, eh?'

'I am a kind of everybody,' answered Jack.

'You'll live to write a work on the Philosophy of the Absolute before you die,' said Bryan, chuckling. 'But the fact is, we can go on arguing for ever. All we know is that nothing ever occurs in

more than one way, and the just inference is that it could not have occurred in any other. If I make a fortune, or murder my father, I can't help it, though it may seem to me that I can. Wickedness is a Will-o'-the-Wisp. If you are a saint, it's no credit to you; if you are a devil, don't blame yourself. So drive ahead and enjoy the fun! That's the oldest creed in the world, and has the most reason in it. Certain things are bound to be done, and certain people are bound to do them. Why should we worry about it? You might as well expect a bottle to break its heart because it holds gin instead of Madeira. Come, let's get back to camp. To think of my coming to California to sit and moralise over a lot of raw beef! Come on!'

They spent that afternoon in camp; Bryan lying at full length, smoking and reading a small volume of Shakespeare that he had brought with him from England, while Jack strolled off to the clayey margin of the neighbouring stream, where he appeared to be very busy about something. Towards evening Bryan got up, thrust his book into his pocket, and lounged over to him. Jack was so much absorbed in his occupation that he did not seem to notice the other's approach. Bryan looked, and then looked again with undisguised curiosity. At last he said—

'Where the devil did you learn that?'

Jack glanced up with an abstracted air, shook his head, and smiled.

'Come, young fellow,' continued Bryan, directing a sharp look into his companion's eyes, 'you were never taught that by the Indians. It looks more like a Parisian fine-art school. What's the meaning of it? Own up!'

'I have done a great many such things,' Jack replied indifferently. 'Nobody taught me. The Indians used to say I must be a medicine-man; but it's easy enough; I like to do it.'

'Do you mean to say you got at a group like that by the light of nature? Why, man, it's a work of art! Barye himself couldn't put more life into it. It's genius, man alive!'

'Anybody could do it, if they knew the animals; of course I know them, for I've lived among them all my life. You just take a piece of clay, and do—like this.'

'So I see; only you're the only man I know who can do it. Why, bless my soul—why, Jack, this is the biggest lark yet. This puts a new face on things. Here's a talent hidden away under a bushel indeed! You can get on in Europe without me. The wild sculptor of the Sierras! The only difficulty will be to make 'em believe you're genuine.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Jack, getting to his feet and meeting the other's gaze with a look of embarrassment not unmixed with annoyance. 'I didn't mean it to be seen.'

'It's just as well I saw it, though,' returned Bryan, in high good humour. 'Sit down again, my man; I'm not half done with this yet. Pity we can't take it along with us. However, if you can do others like it—no, but this does beat the Dutch.'

But it is time that this marvel, which so exercised Bryan's mind and moved his admiration should be more particularly described. It was nothing more or less wonderful than a small model in clay of the scene they had witnessed a few hours before—the death struggle of the grizzly and the buffalo. There they lay, locked together, the character and proportions of each animal accurately albeit roughly portrayed; a work of art, as Bryan had said, with all the simplicity, all the mystery, and all the charm that every true work of art must possess. It was rudely and rapidly done; but the modifications which a more academic and classically trained eye might have suggested, would have been in the direction of elaboration and detail, not of conception or construction. Knowledge was shown in this group, and observation of nature; the limbs and bodies were justly shaped and placed; the pose was unforced and natural. The work was executed with large and sure touches, betokening a firm and clear imaginative grasp of the subject; there was nothing uncertain about it, and nothing tentative. But over and above all this, which is merely the mechanical and practical side of the matter, there was the indescribable fascination that can be given only by the hand of the artist. It gave assurance of a mind that would not only be faithful to fact, but would never offend the unwritten and uncommunicable laws of taste and harmony. It put the spectator at his ease, convinced that here was something more than cleverness and talent. The work reproduced nature, but it created something besides, which nature has not. It fulfilled the promise which nature ever makes but never entirely keeps. It was nature refined and elevated by human thought. For the perfection of nature is in substance and function, not in form and disposition; these being realised only when the mind of the Creator works through that of his amplest creature—man. And Jack, the half-wild, untutored, Indian-bred lad, who had never seen a statue or heard of an artist, had discovered art for himself. He did not know that he was an artist; or, rather, he did not know that his gift was not shared in equal measure by any human being that might choose to exercise it. He had been content with the pleasure that he found in it—a pleasure as yet wholly pure from vanity or ambition. He had never conceived, and could hardly have been brought at once to understand, that an endowment so inward and spiritual as this could bring him popular fame and admiration, much less material emolument. It seemed to him a thing as impalpable and, in a certain sense, as sacred as the glow of passion in a lover's heart, or the reverence of his soul before the tender sublimity of a summer morning on a mountain-top. It wrought a shyness in him, as being the outcome of something better and more worshipful than himself, so that his seeming to be the doer of it was a piece of scarcely respectable pretence. He did not like to talk about it or to publish it in any way; it was a delight the indulgence in which could be justified only by privacy.

And how did Jack discover art in the western wilderness? As to that there is no record; Jack himself certainly could have given no

explanation of it. But his training probably began with his first intelligent outlook upon the face of nature; and unconsciously he availed himself of every fact of his observation and experience to promote it. Art, in our time, has become so much a matter of imitation, of fashion, and of expediency, that we are disposed to wonder how any one should be able to develop a love for it and a proficiency in it on independent grounds. But the essentials of genuine art must always be independent of schools and traditions. These are of use only on the lower levels of execution and facility; in the higher and more vital regions their value is insignificant. The classic results of art, and the fellowship of artists, may indeed enlarge the conception of what can be done, and promote the doing of it by the spur of emulation; but the truest artist is he who least requires such stimulus. The greater the sincerity and purity of motive wherewith the muse is entertained, the more completely does she enable her votary to stand upon his own feet. To Jack, in his solitude, she had revealed her heart, and he had reverenced the revelation and availed himself of it; although never presuming to suppose, because the privilege was great, that it was therefore in any degree peculiar to himself. He saw that light, love, and the earth were given to all men alike; why not also, then, this power of interpretation? It was true that the art of the Indians was confined to the application of ochre and wampum to their persons, and the manufacture of arrow-heads and pipe-bowls; but the faculty might be latent within them, though they did not choose to employ it.

In the present history little space will be given to the consideration of Jack's works of art in themselves. They are mentioned chiefly because of the subjective quality which they postulate in him. In the pages which are to come, the events of his life, and of those with whom he was brought into contact, succeed each other so quickly as to afford small opportunity for even apposite digression; and, after all, the best of what we know and do is mainly important as indicating what we are. Human passion, the wrestle of life with circumstance, the varied manifestations of the one great nature that is in us all—these, in the last analysis, are the only things we really care to hear about, at all events on the mortal plane. And as to spiritual matters, the more we learn about them, the more they seem to be the cause of which the drama here is but the visible garment and result.

Meanwhile, Jack's group of the grizzly bear and the buffalo bull, the first of his productions whereof any authentic account exists, was itself perforce left to its fate on the banks of the stream where it was made. But it is not probable that the fame which he subsequently attained lost much thereby. Excellent and strikingly original as his early works were, nothing was more noticeable in his artistic career than his constant progress from good to better. However, we are anticipating.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'Nemo repente fuit turpissimus,' perhaps; but the securest path of virtue sometimes appears to be little better than tight-rope walking in the dark.

DURING the remainder of their journey to the coast, the character of the intercourse between Jack and Bryan gradually modified itself, and began to be established upon a new basis. Bryan had, at first, been attracted to the younger man by the interest which may generally be supposed to invest a person whom one has come near murdering; and afterwards, by the remarkably unsophisticated and impressible, yet withal dignified and reserved disposition which the young white chief displayed. The whimsical notion of introducing him to society as a lion of the first magnitude, and fortifying him in that position with all the aids that money and rhetoric could supply, had additionally confirmed him in his attitude of beneficence. I say beneficence rather than benevolence advisedly; there being no definite testimony to show that Bryan contemplated any spiritual (or even permanent material) benefit to his *protégé*. Like other men one has heard of, his primary object was to entertain himself. It was not every day that an experimenter in human character came across an unwritten page like Jack, or one so sensitive to impressions. It could not fail to be interesting to observe how he would take the world's inscriptions, and what sort of inscriptions would get written on him. If the inscriptions spoiled the page, making it commonplace and worthless—why, there would be an end of the experiment. As an experiment it would have been no less interesting than if the aforesaid page should become enriched with the most precious wisdom and resplendent illuminations. The latter might of course be its destiny; though Bryan would probably not have given odds on that contingency; for he knew the ordinary results of a sudden change from solitude and ignorance to the crowds and the knowledge of civilisation; and it was by no means his purpose to surround Jack with any barrier against the influx of the new life. Quite the contrary. Bryan was ready to admit that he was neither a missionary nor a philanthropist.

On the other hand he was perhaps equally far from considering himself a Mephistopheles. So far as he knew, there was no humane or amiable sentiment common to humanity which he did not have his fair share of. He liked to give a beggar a shilling, to rescue a woman from a ruffian, to exchange a merry jest with a chance companion, to nurse a sick man, and feed a hungry one; in a word, to do any and all such things as minister to the doer's gratification by gratifying the other party. In so far he was no worse nor better than other men; but he differed from most of them (in his own opinion at least) in the higher intellectual perception which enabled him to see that good and evil are but different aspects of a curious old bugbear of the

imagination, founded upon an irrational view of the relations between man and destiny. The only rational fault that a human being could commit was to throw away an opportunity of self-satisfaction; self-satisfaction being understood in the large sense, not as being restricted to mere material gain and aggrandisement, but including also numerous immaterial advantages which might look at first sight like self-sacrifices.

I offer these suggestions for what they are worth, and without dogmatism; historians, as well as other people, being prone to inquire into the motives of the characters with whom they do business, and to believe (perhaps erroneously) that all action must be preceded by motive. But it is impossible to over-estimate a person's plausibility in his own eyes, or his power of squaring what he does with his notions of propriety and good sense. Shakespeare's Richard III. may call himself a villain; but he is careful at the same time to adduce reasons proving that, in his opinion, a villain is the only respectable thing to be. The Christian fathers and their modern descendants may exclaim that they are fools and sinners; but they only do so when a change in their moral attitude has enabled them to regard their sinfulness and folly as something from which they are more or less detached. In other words, to jump out of our own skins is a feat achieved by but few of us; and very likely it is just as well that so it should be.

'What do you most want to do, Jack, when we get to London?' Bryan inquired one day.

'To go to a theatre and see a tragedy,' the young man replied.

'Hullo! Have they theatres and tragedies in the Sacramento valley, as well as fine-art academies? When shall I get to the bottom of you, Jack?'

'Some one told me about them before I left the first place,' said Jack, who always used this term when he meant Suncook. In the early Californian days it was not the custom for men to mention the names and particulars of their previous history.

'Did you ever read a tragedy, or hear one?' Bryan asked.

'No; but I believe there is one called "Othello,"' replied Jack, who had a very retentive memory.

'So there is; and if you like you shall hear some of it,' exclaimed Bryan; and he pulled his Shakespeare out of his pocket.

They were on horseback at the time, riding amidst some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. Bryan was a capital elocutionist, with a strong dramatic talent; and he began at the beginning, and read out the whole great play with abundant force and passion. Jack, who had never heard or imagined the like of it in his life, became aroused and excited to a high pitch; and before the end of the first act he had ceased to think either of book or reader, and believed it was all real —terribly and intolerably real. Bryan felt the contagion of his enthusiasm; and as he knew most of the speeches by heart, he gave them as if the matter were real indeed. At the more exciting passages

they put spurs to their horses and galloped. Perhaps the drama has seldom been presented under circumstances more exhilarating. Tom Berne rode behind, and listened, in his dull and unresponsive way, likewise. The rocky cañons echoed back the immortal words; the gloomy pines grew darker at the tragedy. Sometimes a coyote ran across the path, and paused afar with pricked-up ears. Anon the broad sunshine flung its glare upon the pitiless villainy of Iago. Here a roaring cataract took up the burden of Othello's heart-broken groan; or the whisper of the breeze in the madrono repeated the last quavering farewell of Desdemona. When it was over, Jack reined in his horse, and leaned forward with his face upon its neck, in a tumult of emotion. When he looked up again it was with a sort of astonishment to see only Bryan beside him. Where were all those phantoms that had thronged around him but now?

'Shakespeare's a great fellow, isn't he?' said Bryan.

'Shakespeare?' echoed Jack, vaguely, with blank gaze.

'Shakespeare wrote it.'

'But it was so!' said Jack, indignantly.

'It sounds like it certainly,' returned Bryan, nodding and smiling. 'It is just as real as you and I are; or may be a great deal more so.'

'I want to ride alone a while,' said Jack, motioning to his companion to precede him. 'Go on; I'll come up with you at the halt.'

Bryan laughed, allowing himself to be flattered by this unconscious tribute to the vigour of his delivery, and rode ahead as desired. Jack followed slowly.

At first his mind dwelt amongst the scenes and people of the play. He lived through it all again. As is inevitable, he identified himself, and persons he had known, with the various characters. Then he compared his actual past life with this fierce and brief imaginary life; and the contrast dissatisfied him. It was not only that it made his own life appear flat and dull, it also made it seem, in some of its aspects, base and ignoble. For one effect of a portrayal of great characters and passions like 'Othello,' is to raise the auditor to a higher spiritual level, where only lofty deeds and motives seemed tolerable. It is a grand, impersonal criticism upon our petty ways and thoughts. Jack had at least one thing to reproach himself with; was it too late to wipe out a part of that reproach? He drew his rein, and turning in the saddle gazed northward. The snowy mountain which had answered to his look during a certain period of his life was now invisible beneath the horizon; but he could make it rise again; should he do so? He was alone; he might ride which way he would. 'Koo-ahi, are you alive?'

He sat a long while, deep in painful thought. At last he turned again, and rode onward as before, slowly, with his chin upon his breast.

'If it is not too late now it will not be too late a year hence, and then I can come back.'

After a while he put his hand to his breast and drew out the

golden locket. The face pictured there . . . . this face was the true guide and ideal of his life; and this face dwelt not near Mount Shasta. It must be sought and followed over seas. Such a face could not but lead to good. It was worthier of trust than his own judgment or conscience. He would trust it and pursue it. It was the symbol of all nobility and right. Let the dusky face vanish, since the two were opposed. It had been loved, but it must vanish. It was the love of a lower sphere of existence. All changes had their pain—even the change from lower to higher; even the change of growth. Childhood was sweet, but who that could be a man would willingly remain a child? Farewell, Kooahi, and all whereof thou art the emblem! Loving brown face, tender midnight eyes, black canopy of tangled hair, farewell! Bare clinging arms, warm bosom, gentle voice, farewell! Thou art the shadow of the simple past. This royal countenance, bright with the light and intelligence of the future, beckons away from thee. It must be so. Ay, for to him who has chosen, no choice remains.

At sundown Jack rejoined the others at the camping-ground.

'I shall be in the way of showing you theatres and tragedies to your heart's content,' remarked Bryan to him over their supper, for I am going to marry a great actress.'

'Will she be Desdemona?' inquired Jack.

'Well, not except on the stage, let us hope,' chuckled the other. 'I'm no Othello, to smother a poor woman with a pillow because she loses my handkerchief. Anyhow, it would need a very honest Iago to stir me up to it.'

'Is she beautiful?'

'She will be one of the most magnificent creatures above ground. She's as graceful as a leopard and as proud as a peacock; and she loves me to desperation. If it were not for that, Prince Jack, I should think twice before introducing you to her.'

'Why?' demanded the ingenuous youth.

'Because you're so damnably good-looking. It might have been better if that bullet of mine had gouged out your left eye or smoothed down your nose. Your artistic genius would have remained intact, and you would have been a much less dangerous fellow among women. It would have been better for you as well as for them, for a handsome man is generally ruined by women, whereas if you were minus a feature or two you would be left in peace to produce your immortal works.'

A great deal of what Bryan was in the habit of saying was as unintelligible to Jack as if it had been uttered in an unknown tongue, but on these occasions he seldom asked for an explanation. Bryan had noticed this, and sometimes purposely talked in riddles in order to stimulate inquiry, but uniformly in vain. Jack had as yet no promiscuous curiosity, he desired information only on those subjects which had already begun to interest him. It did not interest him to be told that he was handsome, nor was he concerned to know why his beauty

should be dangerous to others or destructive to himself. As for women, there were but two to his consciousness; one of whom represented what he had known, while the other was the type of what he might know hereafter, if he were fortunate and worthy. He made no reply, therefore, to Bryan's speech, and indeed had the air of not having heard much of it.

'Considering that you don't appear to be a designing fellow you are remarkably mysterious,' the latter resumed after a pause. 'I find out some startling fact about you now and then, but you never tell me anything. Who were your father and mother, for instance?'

'I don't know. Never saw them.'

'You were suckled by a wolf, perhaps, like some great men before you?'

Jack shook his head gravely.

'Did you ever commit a murder?' pursued Bryan, humorously.

Jack's long brown eyes twitched and his face grew warm. At last he replied again,

'I don't know.'

'The act of a preoccupied moment, eh?' said Bryan, laughing, but not wholly disguising his curiosity. 'Who was the victim? a woman?'

Jack directed a look at his companion such as the latter had not supposed his meditative eyes were capable of.

'Do not ask such questions,' he said haughtily.

But Bryan's curiosity was not yet at an end.

'Come, now,' he said, 'I'll wager a woman is what's the matter with you. Out with it, my man! You got tangled up with one of these red-skinned hussies, and just gave her a taste of the tomahawk —eh?'

Hereupon Jack rose erect and put his hand to his belt. The expression of his face was as vivid and threatening as the flash of a naked sword.

'If you speak of such things—I may kill you!' he said, with steady deliberation.

'Well, I shan't put you to that trouble,' replied Bryan good-naturedly, after having encountered Jack's eyes for a few moments. He had never liked any man so much as he liked Jack at that instant; moreover, he had got a deeper glimpse into his nature than Jack could have voluntarily given him.

Jack turned away—and met another pair of eyes fastened eagerly upon his own. Tom Berne had been mending some harness at a little distance from the speakers, and might have overheard all that had passed between them. Nobody was accustomed to heed Tom Berne, whether for good or evil, nor would Jack have done so in the present instance had it not been for the peculiar twist which he had given to his ordinarily expressionless features. He made a rapid sign with his fingers—a signal of secret intelligence, as it seemed—and then bent over his harness again. Jack limped away, and sat beneath a pine tree for

an hour or two by himself. He had taken his banjo with him, but he was not in a mood to play upon it. The darkness fell; there was no moon, but a million stars thronged the abyss of heaven with pure points of fire.

The calm and fresh immensity of the night soothed the young man's perturbed spirit. He had threatened Bryan; but he had done so less from an impulse of personal hostility against him than from a feeling that an outrage was being committed which must be checked at any cost. He now saw that Bryan must have erred inadvertently; and he was able to separate the man—towards whom he felt affection and gratitude—from the hateful suggestion he had unthinkingly made. He saw, too, that had his own conscience been at ease, his resentment would have been less ready. He was more blameworthy than Bryan; and it was the secret consciousness of this, more than Bryan's words, that had brought the flash of deadly purpose to his brain. To kill a fellow-mortal was beyond most things abhorrent to Jack's temperament; and yet he had found himself confronted with the imminent possibility of such a deed more than once. And, perhaps, 'possibility' would be exchanged for another word if the Witch's Head could speak!

Penetrated with these remorseful reflections he returned to the camp. All was silent there; the light of the fire coquetted with the long arms of shadow which reached forward from the surrounding darkness, and were withdrawn into it again, as the flame leaped or sank. Bryan was lying with his feet towards the fire, and his head pillowed upon his saddle. He lay face upwards: one knee was drawn up; one hand, holding his pipe, lay upon his breast; the other arm was extended on the ground. His head was bare, and his eyes were closed; his breath came long and regularly. He was sound asleep.

Jack came within a short distance, and then paused, looking down on the sleeper. The great strength and energy of this man imparted an expression of peculiar helplessness to his slumbering aspect. Awake, he was a match for half-a-dozen ordinary men; asleep, he was at the mercy of a child with a weapon in its hand. So strictly limited is human power; and so absolute is the confidence which the most amply endowed man must put in his fellows. A sleeping giant, even though he be a savage and tyrannous one, may well excite the compassion and claim the protection of his very victim, because the latter is then so completely his master.

When Jack turned away, he found himself face to face with Tom Berne, who had crept up behind him. Tom was, as a general rule, intoxicated at this hour; but he seemed not to be so on the present occasion; his condition was a much less normal one. Something was at work in the fellow's mind which had wrought him up to a pitch of unwonted excitement, manifested in a certain stealthy suddenness of movement, and in a disagreeable glitter and screwing together of the eyes. He looked at Jack with a watchful half-grin coming and going upon his lips; and presently tipped him a wink of intense, though ambiguous, significance.

'What do you want?' demanded Jack in a whisper. He could never accustom himself to the repulsiveness of this fellow.

'Say—hearken down a bit,' whispered back Tom, nodding towards the sleeping figure, and winking at Jack. 'Supposin' you was 'Thello, and him was 'tother chap—Hago—what would you do to un—say now?'

'If he were Iago,' replied Jack, smiling a little to find that Tom's mind also had been exercised by the tragedy, 'Othello would kill him.'

This reply appeared highly to gratify Tom. Still nodding and winking violently, he endeavoured, by a surreptitious movement, to force something into Jack's hand. This something was a hard, cold object; it was the handle of a revolver.

'What is this for?' asked Jack, drawing back with an impulse of startled disgust.

'To put through his damned brains,' said Tom, curling back his lips so as to disclose his set teeth. 'Go on—kill un!'

'You deserve to be shot yourself,' said Jack, after a short silence. 'But you are drunk.'

'Ay—'a be very drunk,' replied Tom, with another grin. 'But 'twill come, all the same, one day. Keep dark, mister!' And he retired into the shadow.

Upon reflection, Jack decided that the incident was not worth mentioning to Bryan. Tom was probably drunk; but if he had been really dangerous or in earnest, he would hardly have requested Jack to be his catspaw. Nevertheless, it was a disagreeable comment upon his own encounter with Bryan a few hours before. Tom had but played the part of an evil and debased version of Jack himself. Jack wondered whether he would ever become more like Tom than he was now.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'Modern thought is a sly justification often pleaded for opinions and practices that otherwise want a character:' but 'man is made up of awful certainties compared with which the theories of science, however perfect, are but changeful shadows.'

THEY were now but a few days from San Francisco; but these days were rendered large and memorable to Jack by his introduction, through Bryan's mediumship, to the other more famous of Shakespeare's plays. Those which most deeply interested him were 'Macbeth' and 'The Tempest': the visions, the witches, the bodiless presences and voices of earth and air, seemed to him an echo to untold experiences of his own. 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' impressed him not nearly so much; he had never met Oberon and Titania, and Puck had played no pranks with him. But the air-drawn dagger was

terrible to him, and not strange; and the power of Prospero was not whimsical or fabulous. Jack was often disposed to be incredulous of the testimony of his bodily rather than of his spiritual senses. As he found his hand sometimes clumsy in the execution of his thought, so the material aspect of things frequently seemed to him a cumbrous and temporary expedient for the conveyance of subtle and permanent meanings.

It was observed at the beginning of the last chapter that Bryan's opinion of Jack had begun to establish itself upon a new basis. Jack, it appeared, was not merely a promising blank; he was a person of considerable though unusual accomplishments, and of extraordinary and, in some respects, inscrutable faculties. In launching him upon the world, therefore, it was no longer easy to forecast the effect, either for good or ill, that the experience might have upon him. He had genius, in the first place, and his genius had already declared itself in a particular direction; and it is a habit of genius to make all things subservient to its end; so that Jack, instead of merely staring and wondering, might swallow the marvels of civilisation whole, and find them too little instead of too much for his mental digestion. In the second place, he saw either more or less in a given object or phenomenon than the average observer saw; and he drew original and unexpected conclusions from this inspection. Finally, he had a spirit and independence of his own, which were liable to avouch themselves when least anticipated; and though Bryan was accustomed to say to himself and to believe that he could control any man and that he feared none, he had the insight to perceive and the candour to admit that there was a quality or force in Jack which was as much beyond his management as the growth of organisms or the turning of the earth upon its axis. It was a force altogether upon a different plane from any he was conscious of in himself; and being incalculable, it might under certain conditions become formidable also. And, if Jack had been strong in the same way that Bryan was strong, and had thus rivalled him on his own ground, there would have existed a conflict between them, potential or active, which would probably have ended only with the final subjection or extinction of one or other of them. But, as it was, there was no necessity of collision between them; each might be a champion in his own ring, without infringing upon the achievements of the other. Nor was this all. Though they need not oppose, they might importantly assist one another. As a united and mutually complementary pair, they might reasonably expect to prove impregnable to any attack and victorious in any enterprise. Bryan saw, however, that it would be desirable for Jack to abate a little of his fastidiousness and reserve, and to learn to take an interest in matters and projects of a sublunary nature; not that his wings were to be clipped, for it was in them that his strength lay; but he was to be educated to fly near enough to the ground to admit of co-operation with his earth-treading comrade. A year or two in society would probably suffice to rub off the impracticable gloss from the new man's

feathers; the difficulty was to prevent the process from going too far. But Bryan justly had some confidence in his tact and worldly wisdom, and scarcely mistrusted their service in this case. Still the dyeing a soul of a good working colour is after all a ticklish affair; a slight maladroitness may result in turning it out coal-black, which is almost as bad as white for civilised purposes.

Meanwhile Bryan, with all his perception, perhaps failed to perceive that Jack was unconsciously affecting him at least as much as he, with deliberation, was affecting Jack.

To San Francisco they came at length. The appearance of this city in 1847 was, in comparison with its present aspect, as a sparrow to an ostrich. Jack was excited by it, but not stupefied. It even reminded him of an enlarged Suncook. It was not so impressive as a mountain range; but it struck him (who had found even an Indian encampment crowded) as being breathlessly and terribly populous. Scores of absolutely new faces at every turn! white faces, too; which were, somehow, much more intrusively visible and effective than brown ones. Then, such a wealth and variety of wardrobes; such a babel of tongues, speaking for the most part English, or certain dialects thereof. The throng, moreover, was not animated by any pervading or uniform purpose; but every man was hurrying on some affair which seemingly concerned himself alone. There were numbers of women, also; a phenomenon at which Jack could not help gazing with devout astonishment. How different from squaws! He was likewise obliged to notice, with admiration for the ingenious simplicity of the device, that the houses were arranged side by side in straight rows, with narrow strips of space along their fronts, on which the people walked; while intermediate was a broader space, set apart for horses and vehicles. Yes, it was certainly ingenious and useful; but it was embarrassingly conspicuous and oppressive. Impossible to think of living in such places; and yet there were people in them, visible behind the glass windows, and sometimes looking out from them. People—people everywhere! Jack was sure that he loved his fellow mortals heartily and inexhaustibly; but so many of them choked and paralysed him. He did not know one of them; he had never reflected how many persons there might be in the world who were strangers to him. Here were more strange faces in ten minutes than he had met with in the course of the last seven years—nay, he might say during his whole life. Where could they all have come from, and what were they all so busy about? As he gazed down the street, they had the semblance of two long crawling or wriggling animals on both sides of the way. They never stopped, yet they never (in the aggregate) either advanced or retreated. They were always moving and always present; and yet nothing of importance proportionate to this innumerable movement and presence seemed to happen. It was bewildering, almost appalling. Jack began to fear that he had overestimated his power of human endurance—literally. It was like being in a mill; it was like being an ant in an ant-hill; in fact it was

like nothing else describable or conceivable. All the while, in self-defence, as it were, Jack kept assuring himself that they were all human beings like himself, with limbs and organs like his own, sensible to hunger and fatigue as he was, animated like himself with hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, loves. . . . But it was hard to believe it. It was hard to believe that they were real, and not a magical amplification or multiplication of two or three. At moments, the scene, as to its material distinctness, dissolved before Jack's eyes, and he only heard confused sounds, and was conscious of a vague weltering of a great life, that was many in one, a single idea resounding in countless echoes; mankind, perhaps, not men. He felt his own heart beating time to a thousand tunes, his own brain investigating a thousand clues, concocting a thousand plans. Then, in an instant, the faces reappeared again, with their myriad diversities of type and expression, real, separate, inharmonious, incomprehensible. Oh, to clap spurs to his mustang, and fly into solitude and silence!

'What are you muttering about, Jack, my man?' demanded the strong, self-possessed voice of Bryan, riding close at his side. 'How do you like it?'

'Why are there so many?' Jack asked.

'It's the fault either of the men or of the women—philosophers are divided upon the point; probably there are faults on both sides. The thing has been going on like this, and worse, for ages. I don't really know why a thousandth or a hundred-thousandth part so many wouldn't do as well, and better. The experiment, in its best phase, seems hardly worth trying; and a bad business isn't made better by multiplying it. However, there's another way of looking at it. Mankind is a nuisance to nothing so much as to itself; so it is most likely for its own punishment that it exists; and, of course, the more the more punished.'

'What is the punishment?'

'It is derived from this fact—that every single individual you see there, as well as every one of the other thousand millions or so that the world contains, would, if he had his full swing, either kill or enslave all the rest, and steal all that belonged to them.'

'That cannot be true,' replied Jack with conviction.

'I wouldn't like to give one of them the chance,' rejoined Bryan, chuckling. 'I know I'd do it myself; and so would you.'

This seemed to stagger Jack; but after a pause he said, 'So I might, if I turned one way; but if I turned the other, I should give them all I had, and make them happy.'

'When you are a man of the world, you will do neither of those things,' Bryan answered; 'you will split the difference.'

'In what way?'

'Why, under cover of turning (as you call it) the latter way, you do what you can to scrabble along in the former; so you conceal the pilferings of the sinner behind the aureole of the saint.'

'My brother lies!' said Jack, looking at his companion, and speaking with the point-blank simplicity of his Indian training.

'And so will you, when you're wiser,' returned he, with imperturbable good humour. 'But here we are at our hotel. Now for civilisation!'

They dismounted at the most considerable tavern in the town; their horses were taken to the stable in charge of the hostler, and they themselves, at Bryan's direction, were shown into a private apartment, and their luggage, such as it was, brought in with them. After ordering dinner, Bryan bade the landlord send for a goldsmith, and to tell him to bring his scales in his pocket. 'And the bigger scoundrel the fellow is,' he added, 'the better.'

When the landlord had left them, evidently in some doubt whether it might not be the part of prudence to request them to vacate his premises, Bryan locked the door, and drawing a table into the centre of the room emptied upon it all the nuggets and gold dust which he had got together during his months of sojourn in the wilderness. He swept it together in a great glittering heap, remarking, with a comical side-glance at Jack, 'There lie the souls of half the honest men of San Francisco!' Then he threw a table-cloth over the heap, and warned Jack to content himself with listening to the ensuing interview, and not to make any remark. To this the other agreed; and then, after a while, there was a knock at the door. Bryan unlocked it, and admitted the goldsmith. He was a small, high-shouldered man, with a keen swarthy face, ill-shaven, and with a monkey-like trick of working his eyebrows up and down. He glanced round suspiciously at the two men, and remained standing near the door.

'Are you the man I sent for?' inquired Bryan, in a very suave tone.

'Well, I'm a goldsmith, if that's what you sent for,' replied the other, imparting a scooping movement to his head, which left him with his neck stretched forwards to the fullest extent, his forehead wrinkling up into his hair, and his eyes blinking.

'I was alluding to your character,' rejoined Bryan, blandly; 'I sent for the greatest scoundrel in town—but you needn't give your credentials,' he added, as the other made an indignant gesture; 'and if you attempt to go out of the room, I'll blow your brains over the door panel. I was about to say that you carry your credentials on your countenance. But, my dear sir, though I admit you are the worst thief and villain resident in town, I beg to inform you that a far worse one than yourself has the honour of addressing you at this moment. Compared with me, you are as innocent and guileless as a child.'

'Say now, what air you up to, anyhow?' demanded the goldsmith, shifting his position uneasily; 'ef chaff's your game——'

'Quite the contrary; my game is business of the most weighty and private nature. I must inform you, sir, that I am a murderer

and a robber—don't move!—I have shot down numbers of men in cold blood, and rifled their pockets afterwards. I would make no more of burglariously entering your premises, and nailing you down to your counter with a bowie-knife through your heart, than I would of swallowing a whisky cocktail—fact, I assure you. However, my intentions at present are much less objectionable. I have some goods here, stolen, and—metaphorically speaking—steeped in blood, and I wish you to become the receiver of them. The value is between fifty and seventy-five thousand dollars. Have you brought your scales with you?'

'There! that's my darned forgetfulness again!' exclaimed the goldsmith, with a feeble pretence of self-reproach, and edging towards the door. 'Blessed ef I didn't leave 'em on the shelf behind——'

'No, you are doing your excellent memory an injustice. I can see the outline of the scales in the left breast pocket of your coat. If you will hold still a moment, I will put this bullet through the centre of the—ah! I thought I couldn't be mistaken. And now the weights; not the false ones, please; the others. We are getting on capitally.'

The goldsmith had hastily, and with trembling hands, produced his weighing apparatus, and now stood motionless, save for the nervous ups-and-downs of his eyebrows, his bottom wish evidently being that he might come out of this adventure with a whole skin.

Bryan then stepped to the table, threw himself into a dramatic attitude, and whisked off the cloth. The glittering mountain of gold was revealed.

A sudden change took place in the demeanour of the goldsmith. From being relaxed and shaky he abruptly became tense and stiff; his gaze was rigidly fixed upon the gold heap, and he drew his breath slowly and audibly through expanded nostrils. So you may see a cur conduct himself when unexpectedly confronted by a large tomcat, or a strange dog of questionable aspect.

'Step up and take a look at it; it won't hurt you,' said Bryan, cheerfully.

The goldsmith advanced to the table, and plunged his hands into the heap. He lifted up handfuls of the precious stuff, held them close to his face, dandled them, took up pieces and bit them, turned them about, and scrutinised them on every side.

'I'll have to borrow the money for this,' he said at length, and his mouth watered as he spoke. 'There's more there than I've got in the world.'

'What commission do you charge?' inquired Bryan, who had been watching his proceedings with a curious smile on his face.

'Twenty,' replied the other. 'Couldn't do it for less.'

'I'll give you ten if you have the money here within half an hour,' said Bryan. 'You may as well keep that nugget that accidentally got up your sleeve; it'll remind you that we understand each other. Now, off you go; and mind—I want only a thousand in dollars; the rest in sovereigns and Bank of England notes.'

'All right, gentleman,' said the goldsmith, making for the door, but casting glowering looks at the wealth upon the table. 'I guess, by the way, I'll have to bring my boy along to help to carry.'

'Pooh! you show less than your usual perspicacity, my dear colleague,' interrupted Bryan. 'Don't you see that if I'd meant to murder you, I should have called on you in your shop? I can't afford to stain my landlord's carpet. Come alone, or if you think it would pay you better, stay away and send in the police. But look sharp, whatever you do.'

The goldsmith darted off, and Bryan, having locked the door after him, threw himself down on a sofa, and gave way to a hearty chuckle.

'What do you think of business, my man?' he inquired of Jack, at length. 'Edifying, isn't it?'

'I promised you I would not speak,' said Jack; 'but I wanted to ask you why you told nothing but lies? Why do you wish him to think you a murderer and a robber when you are not?'

'Isn't that better than making men believe I am a saint and a Christian when I am not? Besides, as I have often remarked before, we are all of us robbers and murderers at bottom, if the truth were known, and it's nothing to be ashamed of either. However, in this case there were special reasons. My object was to get rid of this gold without kicking up any row. Now, if I had told that little scoundrel, or anybody else, that I dug this stuff out of the ground, we should not be able to stir hand or foot for nine days, for the rush of scamps and idiots asking questions. And then the whole population would plunge head-over-heels into the wilderness to dig gold; and I feel moral scruples against being responsible for embarking thousands of my fellow-creatures in a business of such doubtful expediency as gold-digging. It takes them away from productive industries, makes them desert their homes and families, and inclines them to the practice of dissipation and the formation of anti-church-going societies. But my device obviated all these drawbacks. By the fellow's being a scoundrel, I secured myself against the inconvenience which would otherwise have resulted from scruples on his part as to receiving what he believed to be stolen goods. Having agreed to deal with me, regard for his own skin will keep him from revealing to anyone the fact that this gold exists. He will melt it down into bars and sell it, perhaps in New York six months hence. He will be careful to say nothing to the police, because he has no witnesses to prove my story against me, and because, if he had, it would only lose him the benefit of the transaction. As it is, we shall walk off quietly with our fifty or sixty thousand dollars, and no one will so much as turn to look after us. The only thing I regret is that I didn't send for the honestest man in San Francisco instead of the greatest rogue. It would only have been a question of a little more trouble and time, and the honest man would have been in the same box as the rogue is now; with the additional advantage for him, that

he would have been for ever after preserved from being such an infernal fool and hypocrite as to think or say that he was an honest man again. But alas! I am only human, and my best thoughts will sometimes come too late!' He got up, stretched himself, laughed again, and added, 'Bah! Jack, don't look so solemn, man. I'm only joking, and the goldsmith knows it as well as I do. It's the conventional style in business engagements—that's all. Why, what the devil's the matter, man? What makes you stare so? I'm not a ghost!'

Jack's appearance at this moment was indeed remarkable. Standing erect at his full height—which was over rather than under six feet—his curling brown hair thrown back on his shoulders, one hand grasping the back of the chair from which he had risen, while the other moved vaguely before him, as if to lay hold of something visible only to himself; his eyes were fixed upon Bryan's face in a broad, immovable gaze, which nevertheless seemed to receive no impression from the material object of their regard. The upper eyelids were lifted in a peculiar manner, and the pupils were widely distended. His cheeks and lips were colourless, and the latter were pressed firmly together. At length he spoke, in a low even tone, strangely at variance with the grisly purport of what he said.

'He must be dead——there's the hole in his temple, and thick blood trickling out——Bryan—— His eyes were horrible—they should be shut. He's cold already. Who did it? I heard——no——'

His voice lingered and stopped. Colour returned to his face, and the constraint vanished from his attitude. He closed and reopened his eyes twice or thrice, and shaded them with his hand, as one might do who emerges suddenly from darkness into sunlight. Then he glanced round the room, reseated himself in the chair, and said, in his usual tone—

'How long has that goldsmith been away?'

'Long enough for me to die and come to life again, it seems,' answered Bryan, attempting a nonchalance which he scarcely felt.

Jack looked up at him quickly.

'How did you know that?' he demanded.

'How did you know it—that's the question?' the other returned, with a short laugh.

'Oh—I often have strange thoughts; but I don't speak of them,' said Jack, looking a little troubled, 'I want to ask you,' he went on, 'why you made that man believe you were a murderer and a robber——'

'Ah! I see my eloquence is more soporific than I supposed,' interrupted Bryan, again laughing discordantly. 'You will do me a favour, in your future thinkings, not to think of me—especially when I am by. Some of these days you will injure my digestion. Once is enough for a man to die, in all conscience! Here comes our banker.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The question of pecuniary obligation.—Jack, in the effort to make himself independent, achieves notoriety.—Bryan discovers that blood is thicker than water.

THEIR business satisfactorily concluded, and their dinner eaten, the comrades sallied forth again to make some purchases. And now Jack was for the first time indoctrinated into some of the uses of that mysterious agent, money; and what he saw caused him to take counsel with himself profoundly. It appeared that (without any fair reason that he could find out) money was given in exchange for things that had no trace of money about them. This was perhaps less mysterious than his own forecast of the matter had been—namely, that it needed only that money should be shown in order to insure supplies of anything that might be required. But it introduced this inevitable consideration, that if the money continued to be given away, the time would come when there would be none of it left. It was further evident that two people must get rid of money more quickly than one of them: whence Jack's sage conclusion that he must be accepting, at Bryan's hands, something which he had no claim to enjoy.

'My dear fellow,' said Bryan, on being informed of this difficulty, 'you are making too much haste to be a fool. Nothing is got in this world without its fair equivalent. I just paid that Jew five dollars for a coat. That's my equivalent for five dollars. Say I pay you twenty-five thousand dollars: I have my equivalent in taking you to Europe and seeing how you get on there. The only use of money is to enable its owner to do what he wants to. I want to spend the next year or so in your society. Of course you may, if you choose, thwart my inclination; but it would be a curmudgeonly act on your part, and all my trouble in getting the money would be thrown away.'

'But I want to go to Europe,' objected Jack; 'so you are paying me for doing what I would do at any rate—if I could.'

'That may be my misfortune, but it is your fault,' Bryan replied. 'However, to cut the matter short, you dug out gold enough yourself to take you to Europe without any help from me; and if you want any more, you can earn it whenever you like by modelling bear and buffalo.'

'Will they give money for that?'

'Try them!'

'It doesn't seem a good thing to do,' observed Jack, to whose mind, perhaps, the transaction appeared a sort of vulgarisation of sacred things; as if a man should receive a dinner in return for his

enjoyment of a sunrise, or a coat and waistcoat for loving his wife. 'But I'll try it,' he added, after a period of meditation.

Without being aware of it, Jack produced upon the population of San Francisco a sensation not altogether out of proportion with that which they aroused in him. He was one of the handsomest men of his time, not in figure and features only, but in that use of the body and play and brilliancy of expression without which beauty is wax and paint. There was something of the ideal cavalier of the chivalric age in his face and bearing; and the fullest effect was given to these by the barbaric picturesqueness of his attire. The costume was, indeed, based upon the Indian model; but it had been embellished with such additions in the way of colour and ornament as the wearer's artistic instinct (aided, perhaps, by occasional suggestions from the costume of wandering Mexican vaqueros) had prompted him to make. The result, at all events, even in a place where uncivilised splendour of dress was by no means unfamiliar, was striking in the extreme; not to speak of the telling manner in which it was worn. Jack was a cynosure wherever he went, much more to Bryan's satisfaction than to his own; for to him it seemed only that he looked odd, and, in so far, ridiculous. He was not of the humour that enjoys personal singularity; he wanted to appear like everybody else, and thus to indicate outwardly his inner sentiment of human identity or brotherhood. To be stared at, therefore, made him uncomfortable; and when (as too frequently happened) the starer was a woman, poor Jack would blush like a child, and not know where to look. The young ladies were not slow to perceive this diffidence, which added a final charm to the object of their interest; their hearts dissolved within them, and in this liquefied condition added warmth and lustre to their eloquent eyes. Jack felt it, but comprehended it not; he thought the young ladies, or some of them, were only a little lower than the angels; but his burning desire was to find his way into a slop-suit as fast as possible, so that he might have opportunity to observe them without exciting their animadversions. Bryan, however, was far from falling in with this idea; and upon various ingenious pretexts he baulked Jack in his designs upon the descendants of Abraham. 'You'd better stick to what you have until we are on board our vessel,' he said; 'people will think you are proud and wish to make yourself out better than they are, if you dress in their clothes so soon.' So he and his Indian prince paraded the town in every part, and were beheld of all the inhabitants thereof. A more arduous experience Jack had never endured, though he was immensely exhilarated too, and his mind was thronged with new thoughts and sensations.

The next day a mass of pipe-clay was procured, and Jack set to work upon his first group intended for public exhibition and sale. The subject was two wolves quarrelling over the carcase of a deer. All day long he toiled, and all the ensuing night; until at length, twenty-four hours after its beginning, the work was finished. Jack walked out, made his way to the shore, and took the first ocean bath that he

had enjoyed since Suncook days. Then he returned to the inn and slept till late in the afternoon. Meanwhile Bryan, without saying anything to his comrade, had gone about to make certain arrangements; and when Jack awoke, and came into the room to look at his group, it had disappeared. At that moment Bryan entered. He had adopted the garb of civilisation—comparatively, at least. Over a scarlet waistcoat, cut low to show the bosom of a white shirt with diamonds in it, he wore a close-fitting black coat, and over that again a richly embroidered cloak in the Mexican style. Round his waist was a long and wide silken sash, in the folds of which was stuck a revolver. He had on black trousers and high top-boots, and upon his head was a hat with a broad curving brim. From his neck was suspended a broad gold chain which ended (presumably in a watch) at the pocket of his waistcoat. In this guise he resembled those filibuster chiefs who, not long afterwards, made themselves the terror of Southern California.

'Hullo, Jack! Up already?' said he.

'I was looking for my wolves,' replied Jack, impressed with his comrade's appearance.

'I took care of them; they're down stairs, and everything will be ready in a few minutes.'

'What will be ready?'

'The exhibition—the Art Gallery. In society, Jack, when an artist produces anything, it becomes his duty to let society see it. I know you don't wish to appear peculiar, so I have arranged this for you. The ladies and gentlemen of San Francisco have been invited to assemble this evening to view a group in clay of a deer and wolves, modelled by the distinguished native artist who lately arrived in town. The parlour downstairs has been decorated for the occasion by the landlord, and we shall have a big crowd. You will appear and make a speech, thanking them for their attendance, and giving some details of your early artistic experiences. You may throw in as much romance and imagination there as you choose—the more the better. And then the group will be sold to the highest bidder. That's the programme!'

Bryan, no doubt, was partly prompted by a spirit of mischief in all this; he must have anticipated that Jack would be scared, but probably supposed that he would not take him altogether seriously. In fact, he had made his preparations to do the speech-making himself, and, in general, to superintend the conduct of the affair; and it was with the object of impressing the spectators with an idea of his splendour and importance that he had got himself up in the semi-Mexican style of magnificence that has been alluded to. For Bryan, though cynical enough, and of a mocking spirit, had certain foibles and follies of his own; whereof not the least marked was a conviction (not wholly unjustified, it is true) of his overwhelming personal value and abilities. He liked to show himself; to feel that he was taken at his own self-estimate or above it, and to prove over and over again the reality of his power and influence. In this respect, as in many others,

he was at the opposite pole of feeling from Jack, who, despite outward appearances, was far more truly independent than he. Jack's strength consisted in merging himself in the activities of universal or catholic forces and truths; while Bryan could only satisfy himself of his doughtiness by fighting for his own hand. Between these two energies the world is divided.

Contrary to Bryan's expectation, Jack took the information quietly. It must not be supposed, however, that he was unmoved by it. It went to his marrow like the audible voice of fate, and produced a commotion too profound to be seen. Taking it for granted that the duty, so far as its social aspect was concerned, was as Bryan had stated it, the question came whether it were incumbent upon him on higher grounds likewise. As an individual human being—as Jack—he knew that it would be impossible for him to face an assembly and say anything on the subject of art and his connection with it. Though he had often heard the Indians deliver harangues at their pow-wows, it was a rare thing for Jack himself to utter fifty words in succession. To discuss himself otherwise than as an atom of the general humanity was an exploit as little to be desired as attempted; still less to couple so inglorious a theme with that of art—which, in its prime sense, was not logically distinct to his apprehension from the conception of divinity itself. No; but might it not be due from him to the art which he had presumed to illustrate, to be its spokesman and vindicator upon emergency? He could not deny the force of this obligation; and having once persuaded himself thereof, it only remained to hope that something (not himself) would enable him to fulfil it.

The scene which followed will be best described from the point of view of him who was the chief actor in it. From a sea of inward turmoil and darkness Jack emerged, as it were, to find himself face to face with a crowd of people—a crowd less large, perhaps, in reality than to his apprehension, but quite big enough for the purpose in hand. By some arrangement he stood higher than the crowd, looking down upon them; upon a table beside him was the modelled group: the beams of the setting sun came level through the western window of the room, and drew a transparent veil of dusty light between Jack and the majority of the spectators—a veil which probably did Jack good service. There was a confused buzz and murmur of voices: all at once a loud and distinct voice, close to Jack, yet seeming to proceed from a distance of many leagues, and which sounded grotesquely strange, yet was unmistakably the voice of Bryan, uttered some words which appeared to be mere arbitrary noises, though nevertheless plainly conveying that if the ladies and gentlemen present would please to preserve silence, the sculptor of the group they had all admired would like to address a few remarks to them. Hereupon there was a louder murmur for a moment; and then a hush. For a moment Jack was under the impression that the expanse of faces before him was condensing into a gigantic missile, aimed to strike him between the eyes, and impale him for ever, a shameful spectacle for

the abomination of mankind. The next moment, this agony passed away like a flame that is extinguished; and Jack found himself thinking quite calmly and lucidly, and with an actual glow of mental elevation, the series of thoughts ensuing; though whether he also gave them audible utterance he was not at the time aware; but he had a feeling that the faces (rendered pleasingly indistinct by a golden haze which overspread them) were on his side instead of being opposed to him; and from this, and other circumstances that came to his knowledge afterwards, he inferred that he must have spoken aloud.

'I always loved animals. They are beautiful carelessly, without knowing it. They are more beautiful at some times than at others. That is so with all things. But the way is to look at the beautiful, and not to look at the ugly; and to keep the beautiful part in your memory, and leave the ugly out. [A voice: "That's what Dave Matthews did when he ran away with Mrs. Creamer!"] The ugly part seems a mistake. I used to wonder why it was there at all. I thought, if I had made the world, I would not have anything ugly. But then I saw that the Great Spirit who let the ugly things be, put into my mind the thought of having *no* ugliness: the world was not entirely beautiful, so that we might have a chance to make it so. Our minds are the best thing the Great Spirit has made [doubtful mutterings], but there is no good in our having them unless we use them to make other things better. [Murmurs of relieved assent.] But I found I could not make the least thing. I could see what I wanted in my mind, but it would not come out. At last, one day, I took a piece of clay, and pressed it into the shape of a squirrel eating a nut. Then I saw it was not the thing itself I needed to make, but only the shape of the thing. [Applause.] And it was not I that made even that, but the Great Spirit speaking to my mind. He makes all the real things; but He makes the images of them only through us. And the images have a right to be, because there is something in them that is not in the real things. They are art: they are our best thoughts about nature. We did not help the Great Spirit to make nature; but He helps us to make art. It tells us that we are His children, and that He means us to be happy.'

Hereupon there was great applause, indicative, among other things, of a conviction upon the audience's part that the address had come to an end. A discourse on art which had reached a semi-religious climax, could not, in the nature of things, go any further. But Jack's eloquence—or more accurately, perhaps, Jack himself—had been a success. His words and sentences were comprehensible, if the drift of them were not; and the speaker's appearance and manner had captured the heart where the intellect remained unresponsive. He was a far more interesting affair than either art in the abstract, or the particular example of it which stood upon the table.

'I will give fifty dollars for the clay wolves!' called out some one.

'I'll give seventy-five!' exclaimed another.

'Hundred!' cried a third.

In the midst of this commotion, Jack stood in some bewilderment, not having as yet entered into the new current of sentiment. But when Bryan whispered in his ear, 'Hold out for two hundred and fifty—you'll get it!' he awoke to the situation, and found himself able to deal with it in a style which took every one by surprise, Bryan included.

'It cannot be sold,' he said, loudly and resolutely. 'If there's anything good in it, it isn't my doing; and I can't take money for what is bad. It may be worth more than you can give; or it may be worth nothing. I don't know, and you don't! I must wait till I do know.' As he spoke, he took his knife from his belt, and cut the model into three or four pieces. At this there was a violent uproar, which threatened to become dangerous. Had there not been women present, no doubt something serious might have happened, for the crowd had an indefinite notion that they had been bamboozled. Jack felt himself seized by the arm and hurried out of the room by a door at the back. It was Bryan who had hold of him.

'Let me go,' he said, trying to free himself. 'They don't understand——'

'Small blame to them if they don't,' returned Bryan. 'It would take the twelve apostles rolled into one to understand you. Come along—we had better not be seen till they've had time to find out we haven't picked their pockets—which more than half of them believe now. You're as mad as a March hare, and the wisest thing you can do will be to have a label to that effect stuck in your hat.' By this time they had reached their apartment. Bryan locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

'I only cut up the clay,' said Jack. 'The image is just the same as it was; nothing can hurt that.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Bryan. 'You must be the brother of the man who wrote a description of his dead grandmother, and sent it to the daguerreotypist. Ha!—there goes your audience. You are a wonderful chap. Here's a fellow comes straight out of the wilderness, models a group fit for the Salon at Paris, delivers a lecture to a backwoods audience on the relation of religion to art, sees himself the most popular man in town, with a fortune for the taking, and then quietly gives his friends a slap in the face all round, and tells them they don't know their own minds! What a fine candidate you'd make at an English hustings! The price of rotten eggs would become next to prohibitive. Upon my word, it would be safer travelling with the small-pox personified than with you! But Providence looks after beings of your sort. There go your dupes, laughing and chatting in the finest humour imaginable. If I had tried your game, we should probably have had the house burnt down by this time. You are like Daniel—you were born under a lucky star. A night in the lion's den would only quiet your nerves, and a turn in the fiery furnace might

just save you from catching cold. Luck seeks its man, says the proverb!'

'Well, I suppose it was foolish,' Jack admitted with a sigh; 'but I'm not used to think of selling things. But after all, the model belonged to me as much as anything can belong to anybody. And if they would rather have had it than their money, I ought to have given it to them. I had been thinking of it in another way just before, and forgot everything else.'

No awkward results followed from this episode; it was discovered that no one had been actually defrauded, and, the sculptor's behaviour being incomprehensible, a humorous view was taken of what had occurred, and it was supposed that some profound joke on somebody must have been intended. Meanwhile Bryan rapidly pushed forward the negotiations for departure, and succeeded in securing berths on a fast-sailing merchantman bound for London round the Cape of Good Hope. The day before their sailing they were leaning over the vessel's side, as she lay in dock, when Tom appeared coming along the wharf with his usual slouching gait, carrying a bundle of things for which Bryan had despatched him.

'What a mean-looking rascal it is!' remarked Bryan, pensively. 'He's an example of what a man may become who's had the spirit taken out of him. I remember poor Hugh's telling me anecdotes about him in his boyhood, making him out a fine dashing fellow, full of pluck and by no means stupid. You wouldn't think it to look at him now, would you? He's been cowed, as the phrase is; that is, some man has got the better of him, physically and morally, and so ruined him. There is no degradation to compare with it.'

'It must be degrading to the man who ruined him, too,' said Jack.

'H'm! how do you make that out?'

'It would be a hateful thing to have such power over any one. You would keep thinking of it, and using it. And you would never use it for anything good. You would think of wicked things to be done, only to make him do them. So he would really have a sort of power over you. There could be nothing more degrading than that. I would rather be Tom than the man who spoilt him.'

'But you might get rid of him if you found him troublesome.'

'I don't believe you could get rid of him.'

'Pooh! nonsense!' exclaimed Bryan, throwing his cigar into the water. 'How can that be? Where's the man who spoilt Tom, for instance?'

'He may be dead.'

'Dead! I'll wager he isn't. Tom hasn't the stuff in him to commit a murder.'

'I am sure Tom will be with him when he dies,' said Jack, with a strange positiveness.

'This is your confounded artistic imagination,' returned Bryan looking down into the water and rubbing his beard slowly.

'Why do you keep him?' demanded Jack presently.

Bryan shrugged his shoulders.

'It isn't because you like him?' persisted Jack.

'Like him—the blackguard! No. Well, he's been useful. He asks no questions, and does as he's told. I don't keep him—he stays.'

'I wish you'd send him away!' said Jack, suddenly and emphatically.

'Humph! that's an idea, certainly.'

'Now is the best time. We are going away to-morrow. It's only leaving him here.'

'And glad enough he'd be to stay, I've no doubt.'

'Let him stay, at any rate.'

'Look here, my man, what makes you so tremendously earnest about it?' inquired Bryan, turning a searching glance upon his companion.

'I don't like what is in his face.'

'There's nothing there except his features, is there?'

'Yes—sometimes.'

'Well? What in the devil's name is it?'

'I don't know how to tell you. But it's something that makes me feel you had better not take him with you.'

Bryan laughed, and then was silent for a considerable time. At last he said, 'I don't believe a word of all your nonsense, mind you; but I shall let him stay behind for all that. He's not the sort of valet one would choose for fashionable life in London.'

They still remained leaning against the bulwark; and by-and-by Tom came up to know if there were any more orders.

Bryan faced round upon him and eyed him deliberately from head to foot.

'No,' he said, 'there are no more orders. You're to go.'

'Ay, sir,' replied Tom, beginning to back away.

'To go for good, I mean. I don't want any more of you. We shall part here. You're to stay behind. Do you understand?'

Tom grinned vaguely, but did not move.

'Say "Thank you" and be off!' added Bryan impatiently.

'Beg pardon, sir,' said Tom in a cringing tone. 'Is it me to stay here, and you to sail away, sir?'

'Didn't I speak plain enough?'

'Beg pardon—'a couldn't do that—couldn't indeed, sir.'

'You can't? But I say you shall! Are you going to disobey me?'

'A'd do anythin' for ye, Mr. Bryan—anythin', if it wor' to kill my own brother. But 'a can't stay away from ye—no, 'a cannot!'

'Listen to me, Tom. If you disobey me, it will be the worse for you.'

''A don't care nothin' for that,' Tom replied, with a curious sort of subservient obstinacy. 'You can kill me, if ye will—ye can murder me right here where 'a stand; but 'a can't part from ye no other way, Mr. Bryan.'

'I suppose you mean that you want money,' said Bryan, after a pause, with a contemptuous intonation. 'I intended to give you fifty pounds, and here they are. Take them, and get out—if you don't want me to throw you out!'

He held the money towards him; but Tom still remained immovable. ''Tisn't money 'a need,' he said, 'not if 'twas all in the world. 'A must have you, sir—nothin' else 'ull do me! 'A couldn't live apart from ye; 'tis my meat and drink, and the breath of my body, to be with ye. That's how it is; 'a didn't make it so, myself, and 'a can't help it. A'll serve ye right well, Mr. Bryan, to the last; but to be apart from ye would be a worse death than any what you could give me; and so 'a must stay.'

A look passed between the two men; for a moment it was in the balance whether Bryan did not catch Tom by the throat and hurl him over the side into the narrow strip of bubbling black water between the ship and the jetty. But the moment passed, and the deed had not been done. Bryan returned his money to his pocket, and smiled.

'You see, Jack, what a faithful, affectionate fellow Tom is,' he said, with an effort to maintain his usual light tone. 'We did him injustice, didn't we? It's all right, Tom; here's five dollars; go and have your last drunk on American whisky. I was only joking, you scoundrel. Mind you're on board to-morrow before noon!'

'Thank'ee, sir; ay, 'a won't forget,' said Tom, pulling off his cap and bowing before his master. Then he slouched away and was seen no more.

The next day, at twelve o'clock, the vessel was towed out of dock, and headed for the Golden Gate. Bryan and Jack stood on the quarter-deck and saw the land, the secret of whose riches they alone knew, retire slowly into the distance behind the blue waves. Not they alone, however; there was one other who shared their knowledge; a stupid, uninviting-looking fellow, who sat huddled up against some cordage in the forward part of the ship, his dull eyes fixed upon the sturdy, broad-shouldered figure that leaned so jauntily against the taffrail and puffed his cigar. They were master and slave; but which was the slave, and which the master?

CHAPTER XXIX.

One of the least effective methods of persuasion is rational demonstration.—One of the best ways of becoming yourself is, sometimes, to become somebody else.

APRIL is not invariably the pleasantest month of the London year; in character it is inclined to be retrospective; it evinces a shrewd recollection of March and February, but is reluctant to commit itself to any promises regarding May and June. Nevertheless, there are moments in which it unbends, and, like some persons of a uniformly

unconciliating demeanour, wins immense credit by a touch of merely ordinary affability. It is during one of these fortunate intermissions that I must request the reader to cross the threshold of the Vivians' London residence, and ascend the stairs to the drawing-room, where is to be seen a unique and attractive mantelpiece ornament. A breadth of pallidly agreeable London sunshine falls through the southern window of the room, investigates the flowery pattern of a Brussels carpet, and smiles upon the legs and cushion of a comfortable easy chair, in which is seated a fair-haired and full-chested woman, clad in a black dress trimmed with crape. She sits with her head thrown back, showing a pleasant and spirited profile of straight forehead, aquiline nose, and well-made mouth and chin. Her hands rest on the chair, upon the ends of which her fingers beat occasionally a restless tattoo: her eyes are directed, not upon the mantelpiece ornament, but upon the carved cornice of the room; but she alters her position slightly as from time to time she speaks—which she does in short sentences, rapidly pronounced.

The mantelpiece is a low and broad structure of black marble, with a French plate-glass mirror, in three compartments, with bevelled edges, resting upon it. It is low enough to admit of a person standing on the hearthrug leaning his arms upon it easily. The person now occupying this position (and the person is, in fact, the mantelpiece ornament above referred to), is not, however, a man. The glass behind reflects the nape of a long neck of dusky whiteness, with a soft shadow of hair growing low down upon it; above, is a black coil of broad braids, bound upon a stately and well-proportioned head. You may see, likewise, the smooth outline of an evenly curved cheek, and, depending from the lower tip of a delicate ear, a large hoop of reddish gold. The person, therefore, is evidently a woman; and you would be apt to surmise that she is also a handsome woman, in the first bloom of youth.

But here, instead of any longer confining your researches to the chary revelations of the looking-glass, you will probably prefer to avail yourself of your undoubted privilege to view this interesting object as she actually appears. You see a girl under twenty years of age, though the ease and dignity of her carriage, and the expression of her face, at once grave and vivid, make her seem older. It is a face capable, upon occasion, of singular and subtle mobility. Without any apparent muscular contortion, its owner could make it reflect a complete series of emotions, from the mirth of comedy to the terror or madness of tragedy. Her figure was the fitting instrument to carry out the requirements of such a countenance. It was somewhat tall and slender, but completely developed, and in its motions and poses gave evidence of thorough physical training. Sometimes this lithe figure seemed to dilate and tower; and then the voice, seldom hurried and never indistinct, came in deep tones, more feminine than any shrillness, and more impressive than vociferousness; and no one could not choose but listen. Altogether, here was a young lady likely, from every outward indication, to make a figure in the social world unless

the divinity which shapes our ends were more than usually disregardful of her rough hewing.

She was dressed in a morning costume of soft white cashmere, lined and trimmed with crimson silk. It fitted tightly over the shoulders and upper part of the figure, but the sleeves were very wide below the elbow, and down the front of the dress was inserted a broad strip of puckered silk. Besides her earrings she wore no ornament but a delicate gold chain, to which was suspended some object hidden in her bosom. Her slippers were of crimson satin; and as she stood, one of them was crossed over the other, while her arms were extended along the mantelpiece, against which her shoulders rested. A comfortable fire glowed in the grate beneath; a silent commentary upon the inefficiency of the April sunshine.

'Well, I mean to go,' declared this personage, speaking in a measured tone, after there had been a short pause in the conversation. 'I see no necessity for a chaperone.'

'I'd go in a minute, my dear, if it wasn't a masked ball; but that would be a little too absurd even for me, wouldn't it?' said the older lady. 'And if it weren't a masked ball, I shouldn't a bit mind your going without a chaperone—at least, not so much. That's the way I feel about it.'

'Nobody was ever any better for having a chaperone.'

'Well, society is. It's what people think, we have to look out for. If you do anything unorthodox, people think something's wrong; and that hurts them, if it doesn't hurt you.'

'It is not my business to take care of them.'

'Yes, it is, if you live with them, and go to their parties. And all the more because you are somebody. If you were Jane Smith, you might do what you liked, and nobody 'd mind; but since you're Miss Madeleine Vivian, and heiress to a big fortune, you have to look out.'

Miss Vivian drooped her black eyelashes, and drew up one hand to fillip her earring. 'Its being a masked ball makes it more easy for you to go, instead of less,' she said, shifting the ground of the argument. 'Nobody will know who you are.'

'Oh, my dear child, we don't keep our masks on. As soon as the people are all there, and supper's ready, we take our masks off.'

'We are not obliged to take them off. And we need not stay to supper.'

'Well, but at any rate it would be known I was there. Invitations are issued, you know; and if Miss Kate Roland accepts, how will it mend matters whether she's seen or not?'

'You could refuse, and then go.'

'They wouldn't let me in.'

'I would give my name to the doorkeeper, and say you were my friend, and wished to remain unknown. There would be no difficulty about that. Aha! Mistress Kate, I have thee on the hips!' Miss Vivian extended her arm towards her friend, threw up her head, and smiled splendidly.

'You are a very cunning, underhand, intriguing person,' said Kate, folding her arms and laughing. 'I don't love you a bit! But now see here; it must be all clear and above-board between us two, you know, however much we may deceive other people. I want you to tell me what makes you so set upon going to this particular ball?'

'Because it's a masked ball,' replied Madeleine, coming with a sauntering step across the space that intervened between her and Kate Roland. Then she seated herself upon the side of the latter's chair, put an arm round her neck, and kissed her cheek.

'And in what do you suppose a masked ball is better than any other kind of ball?' demanded Kate, when these endearments had continued a few moments.

'There is the same difference that there is between a ruby and—— Whoever heard so absurd a question?' said Madeleine, raising her head and turning it scornfully.

'You are showing your ignorance, my dear. In an ordinary ball you wear what you're accustomed to, and feel comfortable and respectable; and in a masked ball you wear some outlandish thing that makes you feel like a guy, and a horrid hot mask that gives you a headache.'

'No!' exclaimed Madeleine, starting up. 'Everything most delightful and romantic in life is a masquerade! You can throw aside yourself—you can become what you want to be! I never can be myself—I am ten times myself—as soon as I am not myself! All the world shows like a splendid story; you can do and say the poetry and romance that you have no heart even to think about at ordinary times. And if anything worth living for is to happen to you it would happen then. You would meet some one you loved; or some beautiful dream would come true. I should like to be at a masquerade that went on for ever!'

'Ah, well, there might be some sense in that,' remarked Kate, conscientiously retaining her matter-of-fact attitude. 'It's when you're driving home that you always begin to feel like a fool. As for meeting some one you loved, I don't know whom you'd be likely to meet, unless it were Stanhope Maurice.'

Madeleine let her arms drop listlessly to her sides.

'If I met him there even a masquerade would seem commonplace,' she said.

'I don't know what you call commonplace. You won't find a better man anywhere. And he loves you as hard as he can. And I believe he's lost a lot of money over those wretched mines.'

There was a touch of genius in this latter argument.

'I am sorry if he is losing money,' said Madeleine. 'I would give him all he has lost if it would cure him of thinking he loved me. Perhaps I couldn't find a better man. But I don't want a better man—I don't want a good man at all! You always know what a good man will do and say. A man might as well not be at all if you can say that of him.'

Madeleine was not naturally of a law-abiding temperament; or, if

she recognised laws of her own, they were not at all points in harmony with the code in vogue among the orthodox. Bryan Sinclair, therefore, was a more likely person than Maurice. He must be classed among those who, justifiably or not, are at war with society. The profession of outlawry has always lent itself readily to romantic treatment; by suppressing a number of coarse and ignoble details, and dwelling upon the heroic and adventurous side of the character, a fine picturesque effect may be produced. Bryan could not be termed handsome, but this, instead of being an obstacle to Madeleine's regard for him, was rather in his favour. Either she was handsome enough for two, or else beauty did not form an essential part of the masculine ideal. But Kate did not believe that he cared about Madeleine in a way that would warrant his binding her to himself for life; while it was intrusively apparent, on the other hand, that Sir Stanhope loved the girl without stint. Of late, however, his reverses in his mining speculations had assumed proportions so serious that his pride had taken the alarm, and, from a morbid fear lest his motives should be misconstrued, he had ceased to urge his suit upon the presumptive heiress. Kate was ready to demonstrate to him that he might find a shorter road to her sympathies by a judicious use of this disqualification than by most other methods; but Sir Stanhope would lend countenance to no such argument. His wooing must succeed upon fair terms or not at all.

Such being the situation, Kate was not at a loss to divine who Madeleine was thinking of when she spoke of meeting 'some one you loved' at a masquerade. It did not, of course, enter into Kate's mind to conceive that the some one in question might possibly be present at that entertainment; no news had been received from Sinclair since he went away, and there was no present probability of his return. But she was reminded afresh that Madeleine's sentiment towards him was unchanged, and the manner of the young lady's reference to his character, as being all the more lovable because not conventionally virtuous, cost her a foreboding sigh.

'I hope you will have a happy life, my dear,' she said at length.

'There will be black and white in it, but I hope no grey,' Madeleine returned.

She was in the habit of making such remarks, and they could be taken to signify little more than that she was impatient of a humdrum existence, and longed to be violently absorbed in something. Of Madeleine it might be said, that, as she herself would phrase it, she could only be fully herself when she imagined herself to be some one else. In all her most powerfully-coloured forecasts of life she saw herself enacting the part, not of simple Madeleine Vivian, with her uneventful history and prosaic limitations, but of some untrammelled and dramatic heroine, within whose imagined nature she fancied she could attain wider and more trenchant action. Of course this is only another way of saying that it was her instinct to let the action colour and mould the actress; as, to a certain degree, it does with every one.

But with Madeleine the modification would be not unconscious and involuntary, but deliberate and adjusted, insomuch that when she had conceived of a given set of circumstances in which she should play a part, she would fix upon the figure in her *répertoire* that would best fulfil the exigencies of the occasion; and would say to herself, 'Here I will be Juliet, or Rosalind, or Cordelia; here I will be Lady Macbeth or Desdemona; here I will be Cleopatra'—her *rôles* being nearly all of the Shakespearian category. This trait, while showing an aspiration for a range of existence wider and more many-sided than falls to the ordinary human lot, betrayed at the same time a comparative lack of that idiosyncrasy which prompts a person to cling to his private selfhood as to the most precious and necessary of his possessions. Madeleine, however, never absolutely forsook her identity. But her identity was elastic and versatile, instead of being narrow and rigid; and, like a plant, it arrived at a complete conception of itself only when it had blossomed forth from its potential or seed-like condition, and thrown abroad the branches and blossoms to its utmost experimental development. In a word, she was, by temper and intuition, that strangest of beings, a great actress. Whether she would ever be able to give this spiritual tendency its concrete and nominal realisation was a secret which the future held in reserve. Certain is it, meanwhile, that if the opportunity came it would not find her unprepared; and, on her side, she was more than disposed to help on the opportunity.

The conversation between the two friends came to an end, as such conversations generally do, without reaching a definite conclusion. It is seldom possible to any one to speak of really vital things, unless in moments of exceptional exaltation of feeling, or vividness of circumstance. At the same time, friends whose relation to one another is close and sympathetic, often interpret a silence as easily and accurately as a spoken word. There are many methods of communion between human beings, of which speech is by no means either the commonest or the most explicit.

After the silence had lasted a little while, a servant entered the room, and said that Mr. Bryan Sinclair was down stairs, and wished to know whether the ladies were disengaged.

'Mr. Sinclair may come up,' said Madeleine, in an indifferent tone.

But when the servant had gone out again, her eyes met Kate's. Kate perceived in her expression what seemed to be the sudden and strong up-gush of a new great fountain of life. It parted her lips, arched her brows, and heaved her bosom.

'How strange, just as we were speaking of him,' Madeleine said.

To this Kate could not restrain herself from answering—

'My dear, we've neither of us said a word about him.'

Madeleine blushed, and while she was doing so, Mr. Sinclair came in.

CHAPTER XXX.

Providence often illustrates the brotherhood of man by placing wise people in the category of fools.—Jack has offers of employment from two masters.

SINCLAIR shook hands with the two ladies in his usual hearty and bluff fashion.

'How jolly to find you together,' he said. 'You're looking capitally, Mrs. Roland. City life seems to agree with both of you. How about Lady Maurice and Stanhope?'

'They have sold the Devonshire Place,' replied Kate, after waiting a moment to see whether Madeleine was going to speak. 'Stanhope seems to have made a muddle of those mines of yours.'

'I was afraid he would,' said Sinclair, crossing his legs and shaking his head. 'Poor Stanhope doesn't know when to stop. But now I'm here again things will mend.'

'Not to break is better than to mend,' Kate observed. 'Are you tired of California?'

'California has served my turn. I am the new Columbus. I brought you a specimen, Miss Vivian.'

He took out of his pocket a necklace, made of nuggets of virgin gold, varying gradually in size from bits as small as a pea to a pendant an inch in length; and handed it to Madeleine. She took it, glanced at it, and let it rest on her lap.

'The country is full of those things,' Sinclair remarked.

'I should have been tempted to stay longer,' said Kate.

'Oh, I got what I wanted. A year was my limit. Now the other fellows may try their luck. All I wanted was the bloom of the peach. I found something else there, better than gold in its own way.'

'What is it?' inquired Madeleine, speaking for the first time.

'A genius.'

'Have you taken the bloom off him too?'

This question came from Kate.

'He's bloom all through,' said Sinclair, running the tip of his tongue along his upper lip, and looking amused. 'He invented art for himself. Sculptor in a line of his own—wild animals. I'm going to make a sensation out of him. You ladies must take him up and bring him into fashion. Nothing like him has ever been seen in London.'

'Is he an Indian?' asked Kate Roland.

'A white Indian. He had lived with the red-skins some six or seven years when I found him. The tribe had been massacred, and he was on his way to the coast. He had been a sort of chief among them. Imagine a fellow six foot high in his stockings, handsome as Apollo, and graceful as a panther. He's cut off his hair; it used to

curl down his back fifteen inches. He was as simple as a child, and serious as a sagamore; but since we've been together, especially on the voyage over, I've put a little nineteenth-century civilisation into him; or rather he got it out of me,' added Sinclair, catching and understanding a glance that Kate shot at him. He paused a moment, and said with a chuckle, 'You mustn't think I've spoilt him, Mrs. Roland; that isn't my cue; I know the value of pure metal when I see it. But he seems to suck in information through all his pores, and the more he gets the thirstier he is. Turns it all to good purpose too. They say genius is like fire; but it's like ice in the way it keeps a man fresh. Whatever is of no use to him he will have nothing to do with.'

'A sculptor is he?' Mrs. Roland said.

'I never knew what there was in wild beasts until I saw his models. He can make a figure of a grizzly bear six inches high look as big as life. We took some clay on board with us, and he has been at work during the voyage and modelled half a dozen groups. The captain bought one of them for the amount of the artist's passage-money. As soon as the thing gets wind he can make his living. A work of art by a native prince of California will be the thing that no fashionable drawing-room can be without. And the prince himself will turn the heads of half the women in London. If he plays his cards well he ought to marry an earl's daughter at least in his first six months.'

'And if he doesn't play his cards well, in six months he will be a good-for-nothing toper and vagabond, I suppose,' said Mrs. Roland. 'That is generally the way with people who are brought suddenly into civilisation. We must try to keep him barbarous, my dear,' she added, turning to Madeleine, who still sat with her necklace in her lap, singularly undemonstrative.

'I shall not see him at all,' Madeleine answered, with slow decision.

'My goodness, child, why not?'

Madeleine only shook her head, with compressed lips.

'My talk about him doesn't do him justice,' said Bryan, in a Christian spirit. 'He needs to be got hold of by the best people. Not a bit vicious you know; but the one thing he cannot get through his head is the immortal difference between a man with a good coat and a man with a bad one. He would have the same manner for her Majesty and for her Majesty's laundress. Coming over he was four hours in the forecastle for one in the cabin, because, as he very neatly put it once, the sailors will say what they think, and the cabin folks think what they'll say. But he doesn't talk forecastle lingo. He's a prince, wherever he is. Oh, I'm proud of him.'

'Well, what are your present intentions? Shall you stay in London?' asked Kate.

'My present intention is to go to Lady Mayfair's masked ball on the 7th of next month.'

'Oh!' said Kate, with a glance at Madeleine, who moved slightly and blushed. 'On the 7th, is it?'

'So her ladyship told me.'

'How long have you been in London?' demanded Madeleine, in a dry tone.

'Long enough to wash my face and have a suit of clothes made,' he replied cheerfully. 'You'll be at the ball of course? Lady Mayfair says she entreated you.'

'I shall certainly not think of going,' said Madeleine, with stern impressiveness.

Kate Roland looked up in quick surprise, doubting the evidence of her ears. Madeleine's face was as grim and dark as the Cumæan Sibyl's. Now, it was Kate's desire to keep Madeleine and Sinclair apart; and she had easily inferred from Madeleine's agitation at Sinclair's unexpected appearance, that he was not indifferent to her; and again, from her subsequent silence, that something had gone wrong. But she sagaciously reflected that the best way to promote the misunderstanding would not be forcibly to keep the parties to it from a private interview, while the breach was yet warm; and it was just possible that Bryan might actually have altered his view regarding Madeleine; and if so, the sooner Madeleine knew it the better. Inspired by these arguments, Kate, after a little further conversation, remarked that she had some shopping to do, and requested to be excused while she went to put on her bonnet.

But Madeleine would not accept this concession.

'It is not quite time yet,' she said, 'and since I am going with you, you need not get ready before I do.'

'It is quite time for me to be off,' observed Sinclair, getting to his feet briskly. He betrayed no discomposure, but he had a faculty, upon occasion, of retiring behind the material substance of his face, as it were, and leaving the features to brazen it out without him. 'I looked in to say how-d'ye-do, but it isn't a serious call. I'm not settled yet. I want to have a talk with Stanhope. I shall see you again.'

'Well, I should imagine so,' rejoined Kate with a laugh. 'Bring Stanhope with you when you come. He has been moping lately, and needs comforting.'

'Yes, it seems a long time since we saw him,' said Madeleine. Then, as Sinclair held out his hand to say good-bye, she put the necklace of gold nuggets into his palm, as if she had supposed that was what he wanted. Sinclair let her hand remain as it was, and looked straight into Madeleine's eyes. After a few moments she said, rather feebly,

'You will want to take it with you, I suppose.'

'The thing is a curiosity,' he replied. 'Each piece of gold has a story to it. Some day I'll tell them to you. Suppose you keep it meanwhile?'

Madeleine eyed him hesitatingly. After a pause she slowly put

out her hand and received back the necklace. Sinclair thereupon smiled, nodded a good-bye to Kate Roland, and took his departure.

At the street door a brougham was standing, with a coachman in livery on the box. As Sinclair stepped into it he said, 'Drive to the studio, Tom, and look sharp!' The coachman touched his hat, and the vehicle rolled away.

Jack and Bryan had been in London some two weeks. Bryan had taken lodgings in a fashionable quarter, and was for having Jack do likewise. But Jack, as it turned out, had views of his own. Fashion did not as yet fascinate him. He could not understand how Plantagenet de Vere came to merit and receive more consideration than John Hodge. He was more attracted by the emotional than by the intellectual side of his fellow-beings; and he conceived that intellect tended to diminish or at least to veil emotional activity. When he left the vessel he carried with him the affectionate regards of the men before the mast; while the denizens of the after part of the ship regarded him, some as being cracked, others as a prig. For his own part, he had enjoyed the ocean beyond measure, and was sorely tempted to adopt seamanship as a permanent profession; but he controlled his longings and came ashore. After the first day or two he and Bryan to some extent parted company. Jack was set upon seeing and feeling London in his own way, before turning his attention to clubs and evening receptions, or even to theatres. Bryan was wise enough to let him follow his bent; he gave him a few pieces of sensible and plain-spoken advice, and left him to his devices; only insisting that he should report himself every two or three days. Jack hired a room in the Aldgate coffee-house at a shilling a day, where his furniture consisted of a short bed, a rickety chest of drawers, and a bottomless chair; his company of music-hall actors, fourth-rate shopboys, and tumultuous seamen. From this centre he explored the city, becoming acquainted with regions and phases thereof about which few people west of Temple Bar had so much as heard. His excitement and curiosity enabled him to overcome even the annoyance of his boots, enhanced though it was by the unrelenting hardness of the stone pavements. But when the edge of novelty had worn off, he paid his reckoning to the stout landlord and conveyed himself and his luggage to a respectable old brick house on the Chelsea Embankment, the attic chamber of which was henceforth to be known as his studio. He made the acquaintance of one or two artists, who, impelled first by curiosity and afterwards by interest, gave him a good deal of their company, and introduced him to the wonders of the Zoological Gardens, the British Museum, and the National Gallery. He could now be said to be launched upon his artistic career. Within a week he sold another of his groups. It was bought by an elderly gentleman for whose introduction Bryan was responsible, and who, though a lawyer by calling, owned to artistic proclivities. A few days later this gentleman called again, and imparted the information that a certain Lady Mayfair wanted a life-size bronze group of wild animals in her entrance-hall, and that the sculptors of London had been invited

to send in competitive designs. 'My advice to you is to compete,' added the gentleman; 'and I prognosticate your success.'

'I can send her this,' said Jack, giving a preoccupied dig to the piece on which he was at work. His ignorance prevented him from appreciating the greatness of the opportunity.

'What are you going to call that, if I may ask? Elephant and tiger?'

'I don't know elephants and tigers. This is a deer and panther.'

'I see. I dare say, now, you understand wild beasts as well as I do common law—eh?'

'I know some animals. I used to hunt them and watch them in California.'

'Yes—yes; you were born in California, I think?'

'No; I went there—a long way.'

'I see; Canada.'

'I passed through a part of Canada. But my first place was New England.'

'Ah! I know something about New England: Boston, Newburyport, Portsmouth—eh?'

'Were you ever there?' demanded Jack with some interest.

'No. Never made the trip; but I had a case once that led to my making inquiries. Case of inheritance—romantic rather. Nothing came of it, though. So you're a Bostonian?'

'I never was in Boston.'

'Ah! I fancied all New England people went to Boston.'

'Very few Suncook people ever went there,' said Jack.

'Eh—what's that? What name?'

'Suncook. That was my first place.'

The gentleman had been on his feet during the latter part of this conversation, and was apparently on the point of taking his leave. But he now put his hand on a chair, and sat down upon it with measured deliberation. He raised his eye-glass, and scrutinised Jack with some earnestness. Then he looked away and seemed, for a few moments, to take silent counsel with himself. Jack continued his work without noticing him.

'Suncook—Suncook,' said the gentleman at length, repeating the word slowly. 'Odd name that. Let me see—inland town, I believe, in Massachusetts?'

'No; it's on the sea.' Jack then described its position with some particularity. 'I believe I was born there,' he added. 'It's the first place I remember. I haven't seen it for seven or eight years. I have hardly spoken of it till now.'

'Seven or eight years. You couldn't have been over twenty when you left it.'

'I am only a little over twenty now.'

'Parents still living there, I suppose?'

'I had no parents that I know of. There was only an old man—M. Jacques.'

'H'm! Rather odd your leaving so suddenly—eh?'

'I wanted to go away,' replied Jack, with reserve.

'Of course—of course—very natural! Well—the papers you brought away with you—they got lost I suppose—eh?'

'What papers do you mean?'

'Certificates of birth—all that sort of thing.'

'I never had any. There were no such papers.'

'Papers to prove your identity in case of need. If you wanted to prove your name was Jack Vivian, for instance,'—here the lawyer glanced keenly at the young man, who, however, betrayed no sign of intelligence,—'documentary evidence might be indispensable.'

'My name is nothing but Jack; M. Jacques used to call me Jacques sometimes. There can never be any need of my proving that,' observed Jack indifferently. But after a while he paused in his occupation, looked at his visitor with a slightly puzzled expression, walked to the corner of the room where the banjo was standing, and taking it up, seated himself and began to tune it with an air of abstraction. By-and-by he said, half to himself—

'I seem to have had a talk something like this before.'

'Ha! very likely. With Mr. Bryan Sinclair, I presume? You must often have talked over all these matters with him—eh?'

'No, I never have. I never even spoke to him of Suncook. It was much longer ago than that—it was a dream, perhaps. I forget it.'

The lawyer stayed some while longer, and asked a number of questions, or, to speak more accurately, made a number of interrogative remarks; but without eliciting anything of importance from Jack. At last he took his leave, but not until he had prevailed upon the young sculptor to dine with him one day during the following week.

'We shall be quite alone. I have a few pieces of statuary and pictures I should like to show you—and a glass of port or madeira—the genuine thing, I can assure you.'

'Will Bryan be there?' Jack inquired.

'Not on this occasion. No. And——but, by-the-by, will you do me a favour?'

'Yes,' said Jack, who had not learnt the imprudence of conferring an obligation which might cost him something.

'Simply—for the present—not to mention our conversation to our friend Sinclair. I'm preparing a bit of a surprise for him, perhaps; I'll explain to you later on. That's understood then? Thanks. Till Thursday at six o'clock. Good day, Mr. Vivian—Mr. Jack I would say—Good day.'

'Vivian!' mused Jack, resuming his banjo. 'And my having but one name. I wish I could remember! I wish Bryan were going to dine with us.'

He fell into a reverie, humming a song in an undertone to the accompaniment of the musical strings. In the midst of this, Bryan came in, having just arrived from that interview with Madeleine which has been described.

'Where did you pick up that tune?' he demanded, after the first words of greeting had been said.

'I found it myself when I was a child,' Jack replied.

It was, in fact, the little wordless song which his unknown mother had sung.

'If I'm not mistaken, I heard it in Paris ten years ago—the air is very peculiar. I recollect—the old maiden lady, whose niece had run away——well, that's curious. Was your mother a Frenchwoman, Jack?'

Jack made no reply: he was not attending.

'It would be a capital joke,' continued Bryan, chuckling, 'if you could be made to appear as the lost heir of Castlemere! If I'd thought of it in time, I might have introduced you to English society as the claimant. What a blow for poor old Murdoch!'

'Who?' demanded Jack, suddenly.

'Oh, a fellow-conspirator of mine in bygone days. We met in Paris at the old lady's *salon*. The plot was, that I should marry his daughter, who was heiress to a great estate in the contingency of no nearer claimant existing. But in one way and another, evidence was forthcoming that such a claimant possibly existed, and poor Murdoch set out for America to make investigations. What the deuce can have become of him! Did he and the boy play the Kilkenny cats, or what? There are a great many loose ends in this world. On second thoughts, my man, we won't set you up for the heir. You would spoil my game. If you are Jack Vivian, fourteenth Baron Castlemere, it will become my duty to pitch you out of the window, or brain you with the poker.'

While Bryan rattled on in this style, Jack was pursuing his own thoughts, which took a turn that seemed to him very strange. A vision of faces and events that he had supposed to be the exclusive property of his own remembrance had suddenly risen up, as it were, and uttered themselves aloud. The effect was to make him mentally shrink back and conceal himself. Only after long private meditation could he resolve what to say, if he said anything. Meanwhile, it did not need his promise to the lawyer to lay an embargo upon his tongue.

'You show no curiosity regarding the success of my mission,' exclaimed Bryan at last.

Jack looked at him inquiringly.

'My interview with my lady-love, man! Where have your wits gone wool-gathering again? You are not at all the character to play *fidus Achates* in an intrigue!'

'I remember now: Miss Castlemere.'

'Miss Castlemere, as it suits me to call her—though the deuce knows why I should take such precautions with you, or with anybody else, for that matter! You would never believe, Jack, what a charming alteration has come over the demeanour of all my fashionable friends since my return. When I went away to California, I was

a sort of pariah: there were shady passages in my past; my governor had cut me off with a shilling; I was living by my wits; I was a detrimental; the papas and mammas of society warned their offspring against me; the committees of my clubs gently suggested that my name should fade away from the list of members. But now, all is sunshine and invitation! I go everywhere, dine out every night, am flattered and caressed by those who whilom mistrusted me; marriageable daughters are displayed before me in enticing attitudes, and innocent sons are confided to my guidance and instruction. It is very touching: it is enough to restore the veriest cynic to the first dewy purity of his belief in human nature; and it has, I am sure, nothing to do with the report that I have in some way fallen heir to a million sterling. The only person who doesn't seem to be favourably affected is my lady-love: her behaviour this morning was cold and reticent.'

'I suppose she doesn't love you any more?' said Jack, ingenuously.

'Thanks for the inspiriting suggestion. I was half inclined to think so myself at first. But that is an hour ago; and now I incline to the belief that she loves me more than ever. She is indignant about something; but she ended by keeping the necklace. A word alone with her will make it all right; and that I will have at the masquerade. By the way, you must come to the masquerade, my man. I've got a card for you, and it will be a capital way of making your *début*. You can appear in character—put on deerskin and wampum, and paint your face red and black. You shall be presented to Miss Castlemere.'

'Then she will go?'

'As a matter of fact, she said she wouldn't. But she will change her mind between this and the 7th of May. On that day I propose to publish to the world the fact of our engagement. The wedding will take place on her birthday, next November, when she also comes into her inheritance. You shall be my best man, Jack; unless you're married yourself before then.'

'I may be back in America before then,' said Jack, laying down his banjo and returning to his clay.

'Nonsense! We can't spare you, my man; and you'll find you can't spare us, after you have got used to us a little. What has put America in your head?'

To this question Jack vouchsafed no reply.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lady Mayfair devises an allegorical representation of human society.—Madeleine and Kate Roland exercise their talent for private theatricals.

LADY MAYFAIR'S abode was a sort of architectural continent. Travellers made journeys into it, and the discovery of new regions was occasionally reported. No one pretended to have more than partially explored it. It was the dwelling-place of fashionable civilisation: but it could only in a special sense be termed exclusive. Any sphere of society which had attained a certain level of cultivation and refinement was endowed with its rights of citizenship. In this respect it was an eclectic republic. Royalty itself could not compete with Lady Mayfair in the brilliant catholicity of her entertainments. Her name was Alexandra, and she was called Alexandra the Great, because there were no more social worlds left for her to conquer. She was a slender, congenial, infallible woman, with a graceful neck, a drifting gait, a low voice, and an illustrious smile. Her person was youthful, her experience immense; she had the tact of a strain of music, and the judgment of a planetary system. No one knew who she was or whence she came; but one would sooner speak disrespectfully of the equator than of her; she was much the more absolute and indispensable institution of the two. This woman expressed what everybody was trying to think, and accomplished what everybody was trying to invent. To converse with her was to be made aware of unexpected reservoirs of culture and courtesy within yourself.

It was her custom to begin each season with a great party; a sort of grand review of troops at the opening of the campaign. Here you would recognise the famous figures of former years, and here you would catch the first glimpse of those destined to future renown. On the present occasion the world was to meet itself through the medium of a masquerade. There was once a time when it was not the thing to take one's children out driving in the Row; until one day the Royal family appeared in her Majesty's carriage. It was formerly unfashionable for a lady to be seen in a hansom cab in the afternoon; but on a certain afternoon the Princess of Wales did the impossible deed, and thenceforth it was all right. Within living memory masquerades were not held to be quite respectable; but when it became known that masks were to be worn at Lady Mayfair's, society acknowledged its mistake. Nothing was talked of but costumes and characters; and 'What shall you go as?' became an integral part of the day's language. The literature of masquerades was in demand at the libraries; and everybody became more or less of an authority on historical epochs. A little more, and society would have been in danger of getting irretrievably educated.

Invitations were for nine o'clock; but as supper was to be at one,

it was evident that a broad margin would be allowed for late arrivals. Every guest was required to wear a mask, and not to take it off before supper-time; at that hour it might be removed or not, at pleasure. No one could appear without at least a domino; but characteristic costumes would be preferred. The number of persons likely to be present was variously estimated, and the possibility of unwarranted intruders finding their way in was a subject of interesting conjecture. But Lady Mayfair had never made a mistake, and it was not probable that she would fail in this point. Meanwhile, the idea that something unorthodox might conceivably occur served to enhance the fascination of the general prospect.

On the morning of the 7th of May the topic of the masquerade again came up for discussion between Madeleine and Kate; and the former reiterated her determination not to go. She had remained in an unusually morose frame of mind from the day of Sinclair's first call till now; and had evaded Kate's efforts to get her to explain. 'Nothing is the matter,' she persistently affirmed. 'I have changed my mind.' So much was evident; the question was whether she would change it again. Kate could not disguise her uneasiness. Madeleine could not go on being indignant and uncommunicative for ever; and when the reaction came, it might carry her dangerous lengths. Of course Sinclair was at the bottom of the trouble; though it was not apparent exactly what his offence had been. If, indeed, the offence had been patent, there would have been less cause for anxiety. But an offence which is imaginary or impalpable is liable to be condoned as whimsically as it was taken. The matter of the necklace was an additional source of misgiving. So far as Kate knew, it had never been given back. Sinclair had called several times, but Madeleine had pointedly avoided seeing him alone; if, therefore, anything had been said between him and Madeleine on the subject, it must have been said in deliberate secrecy. Kate's fear had been that Madeleine had been waiting for the masquerade as an opportunity for coming to an understanding with Sinclair in some fashion suited to her dramatic and romantic genius. But she did not know whether to feel relieved or not when Madeleine finally adhered to her purpose of giving the masquerade the go-by.

An hour or two later Madeleine said—

'My Aunt Maria has written that she wishes to see me. I think I shall go there and spend the night. You won't mind being here alone?'

She was holding a letter in her hand as she spoke. Her Aunt Maria, it should be said, was at this time living in another part of London, in a small house which she had rented for her private accommodation. She and her niece had not agreed very well together as co-inmates of one dwelling; but as their differences were mainly temperamental, the separation had had the effect of renewing their friendly relations. They saw each other just as seldom as they pleased, and never outstayed their mutual welcome. Wealthy people ought never to bore one another; one of the most precious uses of

money is the facilities it affords for enabling its possessors to keep apart.

'I think it's a good idea,' Kate answered. 'I can go with you if you like.'

'No; Aunt Maria and I get on better by ourselves.'

'When shall you start?'

'Not till the evening. She sits up most of the night, you know. She likes a quiet game of piquet. You can improve the opportunity of going to bed early and sleeping late. I shall be back to lunch to-morrow.'

After this conversation, Madeleine's spirits began to rise; she was more vivacious and talkative than she had been for many days past. There was a fine vein of arch humour in the girl, which seldom came prominently to the surface, but which, on those rare occasions, seemed to be one of her most charming traits. She had the power of making her mood contagious; and she and Kate behaved like a couple of romping school-girls all the afternoon. They laughed at everything, and said whatever came into their heads, if it was absurd enough. But Kate could not rival Madeleine either in the equality or the abundance of her drollery. She was frequently tempted to exclaim, 'What a splendid comic actress you would make!' but restrained herself from doing so, she scarcely knew why. At last she could keep up the fun no longer, but sat on a sofa in a state of physical exhaustion. Madeleine resumed her favourite position against the mantelpiece, and by-and-by she said—

'Well, we have had one masquerade after all.'

'Have we?'

'Yes, masks and all,' rejoined Madeleine, with an ambiguous smile; and then she added, 'I am going now to pack my portmanteau.'

'Sha'n't I help you?'

'Not for worlds!' said Madeleine, with a grandiloquent gesture; and she swept out of the room.

Left alone, Kate became meditative and, as was apt to be the case with her, even after so many years, melancholy. She thought of her husband, and of the happiness they might have had. She wondered why Providence had not permitted them to have it. Then she reflected on the many cases of marriages which had been permitted to take place, and which had resulted in anything but happiness. Was the one a set-off against the other? But why, under a beneficent ordering of things, should not the right people always be brought together? Was unhappiness really, as moralists affirmed, a blessing in disguise? If such were indeed the fact, the world was blessed wholesale. These considerations brought her to think of Madeleine, and her probable future. Would she be happy? Now that their hour of mirth was over, Kate perceived that it had been, in truth, a masquerade for both of them. The shadow which rested upon Madeleine was not really lifted; only, perhaps, it had become

sc irksome as to necessitate a nervous outbreak of some kind. Was it another phase of the same nervousness that prompted her to spend the evening with her aunt? That certainly seemed a strange way of working off suppressed excitement. And the more Kate pondered upon it, the stranger it seemed.

After an interval, Madeleine reappeared. She had changed her dress, and was in the plainest walking attire. It was now about eight o'clock. They had taken their dinner at luncheon time, and some coffee was now served previous to Madeleine's departure. She carried in her hand the necklace of gold nuggets, which she placed on the mantelpiece. Kate was glad of the assurance thus afforded that there had been no private dealings in the matter between her and Sinclair. Madeleine noticed the direction of her friend's eyes, and immediately said—

'It is just the sort of thing to please Aunt Maria.'

They sat down to their coffee, and again Madeleine was unusually loquacious, though her observations no longer took a humorous turn. She talked, as an uneasy stranger might have done, to avoid stillness. Her discourse mostly related to herself,—what she would like to do; what was worth while doing; what a woman, relying solely upon herself, might accomplish.

'It is men that spoil women,' she said; 'all the famous women have managed without men; and then, out of spite, the men have tried to make it out that the women were not respectable. I would rather be famous than respectable.' When Kate, as in duty bound, protested against this sentiment, Madeleine added, 'I mean what respectable people call respectable—that is dead.'

The servant came in to say that the carriage was at the door.

'Have you put in the portmanteau?' Madeleine asked.

The servant replied in the affirmative. Madeleine arose and put on her hat, and a long cloak that she sometimes wore. She put her arms round Kate and kissed her.

'Good-night,' she said; 'I suppose you'll go to bed early—unless you should decide to go to Lady Mayfair's after all! There's your card and your domino, if you do.'

Kate smiled and sighed.

'I shall see you at luncheon?'

'If we ever meet again at all!' returned the other, laughing and kissing her finger-tips at the door: and with that she was gone.

Kate heard the carriage roll away, and then she took up a book, and fixed her attention upon it with more or less effort for nearly an hour. But it did not interest her, nor yet make her sleepy. She shut it up at last, and went over to the fireplace, to stir the dying embers in the grate. As she laid her hand upon the mantelpiece, it came in contact with a round, hard object—one of the component parts of Sinclair's gold necklace.

Madeleine had forgotten it. Kate's first impulse was to summon a servant, and send him with the necklace to Aunt Maria's; but she

reflected that it would not do to entrust so valuable a thing to a servant's care. Then she asked herself whether she should not take it herself; but after some hesitation she decided that the matter was not of sufficient urgency to warrant that step. Possibly Madeleine had altered her mind about carrying it to show her aunt, who might ask inconvenient questions about it. Having adopted this view, Kate took the necklace in her hand, and went upstairs to lay it away in Madeleine's toilet drawer.

The door of the chamber was shut, but upon opening it, Kate found that the gas was alight on either side of the full-length mirror. A bit of gold lace trimming lay on the floor in front of the mirror. Kate picked it up; it was identical with the trimming which Madeleine had used upon her domino, before the idea of going to the masquerade had been given up. This domino, as Kate knew, had been put away in a certain part of the wardrobe. She now went and looked for it there, and it was not to be found.

This startled her; and some further investigations, which under the circumstances she justified herself in making, all pointed in a direction towards which her suspicions were now turned. Finally she rang the bell for Madeleine's maid, and asked her whether she had dressed her mistress and packed her portmanteau? The girl replied that Miss Vivian had performed both these offices for herself.

Kate hereupon retired to her own chamber to think it over. She was by this time pretty well persuaded that Madeleine had not gone to her aunt's at all, but to the masquerade. For the present, and wisely, Kate forbore to speculate upon the causes which might have impelled her friend to act in this manner; what monopolised her thoughts was the course which she herself ought to adopt under the circumstances. It did not take her long to decide that she must follow Madeleine. It would not be difficult to find her; if she were not at her aunt's, she must be at Lady Mayfair's. The first thing to do, therefore, was to inquire at the former place. It would have been easy to summon the coachman and ask him where he had driven; but Kate felt unwilling to give the servants ground for supposing that anything might be wrong. The more quietly she could proceed the better. She rapidly dressed herself in a simple evening costume, and in order to be prepared for a probable emergency, she rolled up her mask and domino in a bundle, which she took under her outside cloak. She hung the gold necklace round her neck, her plan being, in case Madeleine was after all at her aunt's, to make the necklace the excuse for having called there. Her next care was to tell the footman that she was going to Miss Vivian's, and might be detained overnight; the street door was to be latched, but not bolted, and the servants were to go to bed at the usual hour; if she returned late, she would let herself in with her pass-key. Matters having been thus arranged, she ordered a cab to be called; and when it arrived drove at once to Aunt Maria's. Telling the cabman to wait, she ran up the steps and knocked at the door.

'Is Miss Madeleine Vivian here?' she asked of the domestic who appeared.

'She 'as been here, ma'am—Mrs. Roland,' he added, recognising her; 'she 'as been here, but she didn't stay more than it might be half an hour.'

'But she was really here?' said Kate, who did not know what to think of this intelligence. It was neither one thing nor the other.

'Oh, yes 'm, she was here,' the worthy Thomas replied; and, after a pause, 'Shall I mention to Miss Vivian that you've come, ma'am?'

'No, I wasn't coming in,' Kate said. 'I only came—— I brought something that Miss Madeleine left behind, and that I thought she might require. I hoped to be in time before she went away.' This she said in order that Thomas might not suppose that she was taken by surprise. Then it occurred to add, 'She drove direct from here to Lady Mayfair's, did she not?'

'I couldn't say for certain, Mrs. Roland,' answered Thomas; 'the carriage was sent away, her own carriage was, and she went hoff in a cab. I didn't 'appen to 'ear where she told the cabbie to drive. But I can inquire hup stairs, ma'am.'

'Thank you, it won't be necessary. Of course she will be at Lady Mayfair's. I knew she was going there, but I didn't think she would go so early,' said Kate, in her most cheerful accents. She hoped Thomas would believe that she was rather amused than otherwise by the mistake.

Thomas looked deferential, but unpleasantly sagacious. She went back to her cab, Thomas gallantly escorting her, and opening the door for her.

'Where shall I say, Mrs. Roland?' he inquired at the window.

'To Lady Mayfair's, please,' returned Kate; and the next moment she was again alone with her fears and her perplexities.

It was not easy to see why Madeleine should have gone to her aunt's. Was it merely in order to maintain a literal truthfulness to the ear, while she broke it to the sense? Or could it be that she had finally decided to go to the masquerade only after arriving at Miss Vivian's house? Neither hypothesis was likely. It was more in Madeleine's way to have thought out her scheme beforehand; then she would either not carry it out at all, or she would carry it out as she had planned it. Kate now perceived that it might have been better to have had an interview with Aunt Maria, and to have found out what Madeleine had said and done while there. She consoled herself, however, with the reflection that the girl could be nowhere else than at Lady Mayfair's; otherwise she would not have taken her domino with her. For the rest, Kate was fain to trust to luck and to hope for the best.

The cab was now drawing near its destination, and Kate was reminded that she had not put on her masquerading attire. She unfolded her bundle, and effected the disguise with little difficulty, moralising the while upon the grotesque contrast between her inward

anxiety and her external gaiety. But she was probably not the first masquerader who had been landed in a similar predicament. Glancing out of the window, she found that her cab formed one in a long row of vehicles which were slowly filing past the Mayfair portal. To her impatience it seemed a long time before her turn came to alight. An awning had been erected from the hall door across the pavement, and a broad strip of carpeting was spread to protect the slippered feet from the damp. She was conducted up the steps by a servitor in the garb of the Pope's Swiss Guard at Rome; she had a passing vision of staring faces packed against both sides of the way; and then she was received into a warm glow of lights and colours, a pervading throb of musical sounds, and a thronging movement of quaint and splendid figures. The hall was lit with a ruddy firmament of Chinese lanterns. The pillars and mouldings were swathed with flowers, whose soft but penetrating fragrance rendered breath a luxury. The broad staircase, which reached the first floor by two wide landings, was carpeted with crimson damask; and silken banners and draperies of velvet and cloth of gold festooned the banisters and drooped from wall and ceiling. As Kate reached the head of the staircase, the light became more brilliant, the strains of melody took on a fuller sound, and the multitudinous hum of voices, which the great size of the saloons prevented from becoming oppressive, nevertheless constituted a steady and even undertone. Near the entrance of the first drawing-room, underneath an arched canopy made of roses and lilies fastened to a framework and arranged in a star-shaped pattern, stood Alexandra the Great, as Queen and hostess of the occasion. She was dressed as Titania; and her face was the only one, out of the thousand or more surrounding her, that was unmasked. It bore the ordeal well; it had a quality at once queenly and fairylike, so that there needed little stress of imagination to believe that her magic power had created this wondrous and gorgeous scene out of nothing; and that a wave of her wand could make it vanish into nothing once more. And truly, in one point of view, such was the case.

Having received the greeting of this potent personage, Kate was merged in the throng, and found herself moving slowly in no determinate direction, obedient to the gentle and fitful pressure around her. So luxurious and subtle was the flattery provided for every sense, that for awhile she could be conscious only of sensuous enjoyment. She forgot what had brought her hither, and half ceased to realise where she was. It was a new world, resembling neither in its aims nor its aspects the sober, neutral-tinted world in which mortals live. Here were the swing of embroidered cloaks, the rustle of satin robes, the nod and beck of feathery plumes, the perfumed wave of painted fans, and the sparkle of jewelled sword-hilts. Here were grotesque or beautiful forms from elf-land, from realms of myth and symbol, from the regions of poetry and romance. Everywhere, too, the eye was met by the ambiguous enchantment of a mask—surely one of the most impressive, albeit at the same time

primitive, modifications of nature that humanity ever adopted. The effect of the human countenance—its paramount importance and significance—can never be appreciated until it has concealed itself behind a vizard. A world without faces, without the infinite variety and mobility of features, would be a world whose character and destiny no experience of ours could enable us to declare. A crowd of masks, with their unreal mockery of reality, their lifeless parody of life, is something at once terrible and ludicrous, exhilarating and appalling. If you yield to their influence, you are carried away from yourself, and the mask which you carry upon your own visage seems to have fastened upon your soul. You are the mere creature of a mummery—the apparition of a pantomime; your mask is the only genuine and permanent thing about you, and to take it off would be to deprive yourself of such fantastic existence as you still possess. Meanwhile, within this masked world, there is a singular and intoxicating freedom, or rather license. Your part is as if it were not; your individuality, and with it your responsibility, are no more; you are emancipated from barriers and traditions; the words you speak, the deeds you do, will not be remembered or recorded against you. You are not only not yourself, you are nobody—you are a mask. Or are you more unrestrainedly yourself than ever before, and therefore, to others as well as to yourself, unrecognisable?

Kate, in her plain domino and black silken vizard, escaped much observation, and was allowed to pursue her devious way without any intentional interruption. But at length, as she was passing what appeared to be the deep and broad embrasure of a window, she felt a strong hand grasp her wrist, and turning, found herself confronted by a stalwart figure in chain armour, with a helmet surmounted by a lofty crest in the semblance of a golden eagle with outstretched wings. Kate looked at him attentively, and could perceive that his eyes were meeting hers; but it was impossible, through the polished bars of his helmet, to discern any more than this. She shook her head and was about to withdraw herself from his hold, when, with what seemed a low laugh, he bent down and whispered in her ear—

'I know you; there's no mistaking you, Madeleine Vivian, even if it weren't for my gold nuggets on your breast. I've been waiting for you this hour. Come in here: we sha'n't be interfered with behind these curtains.'

So saying, he drew her into the embrasure, where, though only partially concealed from the assemblage outside, they were out of the general stream of movement, and quite sufficiently secluded for all practical purposes. Kate, after a moment's hesitation, resolved to profit by this unexpected opportunity to learn what Sinclair's relations with Madeleine really were. He had thrown himself into her power, and it would be the height of flimsy Quixotism in her to apprise him of his mistake until she had made him serve her turn.

So she endued herself with all she could muster of Madeleine's manner and bearing, and spoke to her companion in guarded whispers.

CHAPTER XXXII.

'But my lover will not prize all the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes on my face:
He will say, "O love, thine eyes build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace."'

SINCLAIR, on his way to the masquerade, had called at Jack's rooms, meaning to accompany him to the entertainment; but Jack was not at home. He had gone out, Sinclair was informed, an hour or two before, and had left no word as to his destination. As he had shown some disposition to shirk the affair altogether, Sinclair came to the conclusion that he had taken this method to avoid being over-persuaded; so, as there was no help for it, he repaired to Lady Mayfair's alone, where he occupied himself in searching for Madeleine with the result above indicated.

But Jack was not in precisely that shy and wavering mood which Sinclair had credited him with. A new and strange spirit had been rapidly developing itself within him of late. His interviews with the inquiring lawyer had been frequent, and their effect upon him was marked. He said nothing about them to Bryan; but occasionally, when Bryan was with him, he fixed his eyes upon him in a preoccupied way that almost made Bryan nervous. He was not averse from conversation, however; but he seemed inclined to discuss a new range of topics—matters which Bryan would have said were not in his proper line—such as the laws of inheritance, the ownership of land, the organisation of society.

'If I were some one else, I should do as he would do,' he once said; whereat Bryan laughed. Jack explained: 'Our eyes are made to see with, and our tongues to talk with; in the same way, some of us are born to do one thing, and some another.'

'You seem to have been studying a primer of physiology and a child's guide to political economy, and to have got them mixed,' said Bryan.

'All sorts of things get done,' proceeded Jack; 'good things and bad. It is of no consequence who does them. If I never finish this group, it will get finished somehow.'

'There you are wrong,' replied Bryan.

'The meaning of it would get out in some way, if the group itself did not,' Jack persisted.

'Oh, if you're going to argue on the principle of the conservation of energy, you'd better hire a lecture-room,' exclaimed Bryan. 'What you are aiming at amounts to this: men are eggs; the world sucks them. As long as the world sucks them dry, it's all one where

the hole is made.' At this Jack relapsed into silence and went on with his modelling.

However, he was really emerging from the primitive traditions of his past life, and entering upon a new phase. It was characteristic of him to take things as he found them. He accepted the Indian version of existence as long as he was in the way of it; and now the London version had begun to have its influence upon him. He had not the vanity or the strength that delights in isolation for its own sake. If he were eccentric and original, it was inadvertently. He was sure that, in all things for which he was responsible, he was strictly identical with his kind; if he produced anything (such as a prize group of statuary) which the ordinary run of men were not capable of, it was only because it happened so, and it in no way altered or distinguished him personally. And, as he instinctively aimed to be like an Indian while he lived with Indians, so now (after the first strangeness had begun to wear off) his desire in England was to be like Englishmen. He did not recognise the right or reason of adopting and carrying out a private theory of life in opposition to the sense and practice of the majority. Some features of civilisation had, it is true, struck him at first as being very odd and unnatural; but when circumstances led him to picture himself as an outgrowth of civilisation, he felt the impulse to merge himself in it, oddities and all. Nevertheless, during the interval between the lawyer's visit to him and the evening of the masquerade, he was in a state of meditation and transition, and not prepared to avow himself explicitly. But he had made up his mind to go to the masquerade, and he went.

There was a person there in the dress of a Spanish cavalier—a plumed sombrero, an embroidered cloak, doublet and trunk-hose slashed with silk, and boots of yellow leather to the knee. This person, wandering through the crowd, caught sight of a tall figure in the garb of a troubadour, and carrying under his arm an instrument that was neither a guitar nor a mandolin, though it had some of the features of both. The cavalier remembered to have seen something like it before, and was half minded to accost the troubadour, and ask him to sing a ditty to it. But the pressure of the crowd kept them apart; and the troubadour, who moved with a slight limp, passed through the doorway of an adjoining room, and disappeared.

The cavalier continued on his way, which was no way in particular, and gradually found himself approaching the end of the saloon, where, in a balcony elevated high above the floor, a band of stringed instruments was flinging out pungent melody over the heads of the assemblage. Coming to one of the polished marble pillars on which the balcony was supported, he leaned against it and folded his arms. His masked face was turned towards the body of the room, alive with a gorgeous medley of shifting forms and colours; but his manner was abstracted. Perhaps he was listening to the waltz-music that the band was playing. At any rate he had, for the moment, forgotten

where he was in thinking deeply of other things. Just then, a frisky individual, in the guise of Punchinello, tripped over the train of Mary Queen of Scots, and pitched heavily forwards against the cavalier's shoulder. He, in turn, was thrown against a Swiss peasant who was standing near him—to whom he instinctively said, in an undisguised voice—

'I beg your pardon, sir!'

It was a remarkable voice, low and clear, with a quality in it unlike the majority of men's voices. The peasant turned immediately, and surveyed the cavalier from top to toe. The latter, as if abashed at so earnest a scrutiny, raised his hand to his sombrero, and pulled it lower down over his brow. The peasant caught this hand—which was ungloved—and pointing to a sapphire ring upon the forefinger, said—

'I know you; I am Stanhope Maurice.'

'How do you know me?' demanded the cavalier, drawing back.

'By your voice, and by Lord Castlemere's ring. Are you alone here, Madeleine?'

'For the present. I did not expect to meet you.'

'I came here in the hope of meeting you. Otherwise I was going to call on you to-morrow. May I speak to you a moment? If you will take my arm, we can get over to one of the windows, out of the way of the crowd. I am very glad I found you. I should never have guessed you if you hadn't spoken.'

Madeleine (for she it was) said nothing more until they got to a curtained recess at the side of the room. At the end of the recess there was a low divan, on which they seated themselves.

'You are certainly well disguised,' remarked Stanhope.

'I meant to be,' she replied. 'I am not going to unmask. What did you want to say?'

'Well, the upshot of it is, I want to say good-bye. I'm leaving England soon.'

'I'm sorry for that,' said Madeleine, after a pause. 'What makes you wish to go?'

'It isn't a matter of wishing. I've been very unlucky lately—you may have heard something about it. I have heard of a capital chance to do a stroke of business abroad.'

'Where?'

'In America.'

'Who told you of it?'

'Bryan Sinclair. He has just come from there. He says——'

'Do you believe all that Bryan Sinclair tells you? Was it not he who got you into this trouble?'

'Bryan was deceived as well as I. He has always been the best of friends to me. It was partly as a compensation for my ill-luck that he told me of this, which is a secret.'

'Perhaps it is not so much a secret as you suppose. I think Mr.

Sinclair is quite as likely to deceive as to be deceived. Perhaps he only wants you out of the way. There may be something that he wants that he is afraid you might get, if you stayed here.'

'What makes you suspect him? I thought you liked him?'

'I never liked him. I loved him!' said Madeleine deliberately. 'And now that I have told you that, you know I hate him.'

Stanhope did not speak for several moments.

'I would rather have heard anything of Bryan than that,' he said at last. 'He led me to believe otherwise. What has he done that makes you——'

'He has not done what I expect a man who loves me to do,' said Madeleine, in a voice that was low, but hurried and uneven. 'He went away for a year, and when he came back. . . . There is no need for me to say anything. You are going away too.'

'Madeleine, you know what I have felt for you; but now that I am poor—but if my staying here—if you think you could ever——'

'Oh, no, I did not mean that. Hating him does not make me love any one else. That would be too easy a way out of unhappiness. You had better go—if you are sure that things will turn out as he tells you to expect. No doubt you will make money; I believe he did.' Here she sprang up with a laugh. 'How absurd we look, talking melodramatic dialogue to each other in stage dresses! I came here in hopes of getting out of myself, so as to act sensibly; but I'm forgetting my part. I am Don Felix de Salamanca. Señor, do not let me detain you from your affairs.'

Stanhope rose also, and said with much emotion, 'I care more for you than for the world's opinion. If you tell me not to go to America I will stay.'

Madeleine seemed to hesitate, and before she had time to decide upon her reply she caught sight of a figure in the crowd which changed the current of her thoughts. She murmured something, which Stanhope did not distinctly hear, put her hand in his for a moment, and then, with a quickness that prevented him from detaining her, she stepped past him and was almost immediately lost to his view. He turned back and reseated himself upon the divan.

Don Felix, meanwhile, was in close pursuit of a black domino, which he had had no difficulty in recognising. When at length he overtook it he addressed it without ceremony.

'Why did you come here? Have you seen any one?'

'I think you have made a mistake,' said the black domino; but an instant afterwards she exclaimed, putting her hands on the Don's arm, 'Oh, my dear, is it you? I have been—I have so much to tell you! But how did you——?'

'I will explain about myself another time. What have you to tell me?'

'I have been talking with Sinclair. He mistook me for you. Of course he said all sorts of things; he asked me—you—to agree to marry him, secretly, next week. Yes, he did; I'm in such a state of

mind I hardly know what I am about. Thank God it was I and not you—not that I suppose you wouldn't have answered him as I did; but—he's a terrible creature! I am trembling all over; if I'd been a man I'd have knocked him down!'

'Did he say anything else?'

'I don't remember half he said; I was so angry I could hardly help letting him know who I was. He began with a lot of excuses for not having spoken to you sooner. He couldn't get a chance with you alone, and thought you wanted to get rid of him—I don't know what all! I told him very plainly that I—you, you know—would have nothing to do with him, and that he was never to show his face at the house again. I thought for a moment he was going to strike me; I believe he would have done it if we hadn't been in sight of the people. The great brute! Do let us get home!'

'How was he dressed?'

'Oh, chain armour, and an eagle on his helmet—there! there he goes now! Don't let him see us. We can go out by this door.'

'I am not going out yet,' said Madeleine, in a voice that had a ring in it; she had been speaking very quietly heretofore. 'You had no right to interfere. I do not choose to be spoken for. You need not wait for me. I can take care of myself.'

'You are not——? My dear, where are you going?' exclaimed Kate, in a panic. But Madeleine had gone. She followed after the eagle helmet, with a fierce and flushed face beneath her mask, and her heart beating high.

Now the wearer of the helmet, after his very unsatisfactory interview with the domino which he supposed to contain the heiress of Castlemere, had by chance come across the limping troubadour who has been already alluded to. The following dialogue then took place:—

'Well, my man, so you got here after all? If you are ready to be off, I'm with you.'

'I shall stay as long as it lasts. I wish everything were like this.'

'The devil is in it, in my opinion. Whoever invented masks either came from Tophet or has gone there. I have been near losing my temper. If I hadn't remembered that there would be no masks to-morrow I should have lost it past finding. To-morrow I shall see——! Come on! There'll be plenty more of this tomfoolery for you in the course of the season.'

'Not for me; I am going to America next week.'

'Have you still got that maggot in your brain? Damn all masquerades! Haven't you just won the competition for Lady Mayfair's prize group? America indeed!'

'I'll tell you the reason, now that I know it myself. I have found out who my father was. He was an Englishman: a baron. He died, so I am a baron. A part of the land of England is mine, and houses, and money.'

'Well, this is news with a vengeance. And what has it to do with America?'

'Because my grandfather lives there, and I must get the papers to prove my inheritance. There is a lady here in England who thinks it is hers.'

'Why, what in the name of——? What part of America?'

'The place I was born in—Suncook.'

'Suncook! Look here, Jack—but hold on; come out of this cursed crush. Ah, this is better—sit down. Now, may I inquire your grandfather's name?'

'M. Jacques Malgrè. He is French.'

'Was your father French too?'

'I told you he was English. His name was Floyd Vivian.'

The wearer of the helmet clasped his hands over his sword-hilt, and rested his chin upon them. 'If this is a fairy story,' he observed, after a spell of silence, 'it's deucedly ingenious. If it's a fact, you might as well have told me before I winged you in the ankle last summer. Well; now what of this lady, whose prospects in life you are going to knock into a cocked hat? Have you any acquaintance with her?'

'I only know she is the daughter of my father's brother. I don't mean to do her any harm. She can have all she wants. I shall tell her so when I come back from America.'

'Aren't you afraid she may hire an assassin to put an end to you; or that some lover of hers——? However, Baron Jack, I congratulate you. Don't let your prosperity lead you to forget the friends of your adversity. You can tip me a fiver now and then for old acquaintance' sake. By the way, who put you up to this? Who communicated to you the romantic secret of your parentage?'

'I promised him not to tell at present.'

'He wouldn't mind you telling me.'

'He said, not you particularly.'

'The devil he did! Well, as things have gone to-night, it isn't so much matter. Yesterday it might have been different. One gets one's tit for tat in curious ways. Upon the whole, I ought to felicitate myself on having had an escape. Baron Jack, you have helped me to my revenge! Well, I'm going home to think all this over. It may turn out to be only a bit of masquerading after all. Of course I shall see you before you go?'

'Yes,' said the troubadour; and then the other took his leave: and it was while he was under the influence of this amazing news that the Spanish cavalier, Don Felix, accosted him.

The troubadour, meanwhile, remained in the alcove; and being somewhat wearied with the sights and excitement of the evening, he unslung his instrument from his shoulders, tuned it, and began to pluck at the strings. At first he echoed the tunes that the orchestra were playing in the saloon; but, by degrees, he came to rehearse musical reminiscences of his own. The crowd of masquers were by

this time turning their faces towards the supper-room, so that the musician was left more and more in solitude. How long he had been thus he did not know, when, at length, a masquer entered the alcove with a listless and weary step, and flung himself down upon a settee. He threw back his silk-lined cloak, thrust back his plumed sombrero from his brow, and, with a certain recklessness of gesture, pulled off his mask. The countenance thus revealed was of striking beauty, but more smooth and delicate than generally belongs to a man. It was extremely pale, affording a marked contrast to the blackness of the eyes. The troubadour, who had scarcely noticed the cavalier's entrance, went on with his music, humming to it in an undertone.

For some time the situation remained unaltered; but at last the cavalier, emerging from his apparently painful preoccupation, looked up and said, 'May I ask you, sir, where you learnt that air? It is a very peculiar one.'

The musician turned, and seeing that his interlocutor was unmasked, he uncovered his own face likewise. The two looked at each other attentively.

'Did you ever hear it before?' the musician finally asked.

'Yes, long ago. But not in this country.'

'Where?'

'It was in New England. When I was a little girl.'

'A girl! then you are not a man?'

The cavalier's paleness changed to rose colour. 'I forgot. No matter! Yes, I am a woman.'

'I might have known that,' observed the troubadour after a pause. 'I have come round the world to find your face.'

'Do you mean you are from New England?'

'It is eight or nine years since I was there.'

'Yes; eight or nine years since I heard that air you were playing. It was on just such an instrument too. A banjo, I think?'

'This is the same banjo.'

'Are you that little boy? But it can't be!'

'It was in the cave. I said I would come round the world, and play this air——'

'Yes—yes, I remember! You would play it, and by that I should know you. You are really he, then. How strange! I should never have known you but for this.'

'I should have known you, but I should not have known you were that little girl.'

'How would you have known me then?'

'Because your face is the face I have had with me ever since. Do you remember that in the morning, when we said good-bye, you gave me something?'

'A locket? Yes, I know. Have you got that still?'

'Here it is,' said the troubadour, drawing it forth. 'It has a portrait in it, you know, of a beautiful woman's face—the loveliest in the world.'

'I had forgotten that——. Yes, now I remember! Let me see it.'

He came and sat beside her, and they looked at the portrait together.

'It is a little like me,' remarked the cavalier at length.

'It is you! I was always sure there must be such a face, and that I should find it. I have dreamt of it, and seen it in the air a hundred times. Whenever I was unhappy I took out this locket and opened it. I could never have done much of anything if it had not been for this. I should never have come to England.'

'Has it been so much to you?' the other said gently and thoughtfully. 'Well, I am glad the face was like mine. I am glad if even the picture of my face could be of any good or use to anybody. The face itself has never been. Oh, I have your keepsake too—see!' She put her hand to the breast of her doublet, and produced an Indian arrow-head, fastened to a fine gold chain. 'I have always worn it,' she added, with a smile.

He looked at it, and then at her. 'Why do you say you have never been of any good?' he asked.

'I have only done harm; and most of all to myself.'

'I don't believe you could ever be anything but good to any one.'

'Ah! you don't know me.'

'I don't know who you are. But I know you.'

'I hope you will never know who I am. As long as you do not, perhaps I may be of some good to you. I should like to think that! Is there any chance of our knowing each other, like other people?'

'I may not see you again for a long time. I am going away very soon.'

'Well—I am glad. But I am glad we have seen each other, once, like this. I don't know what I may be a year from now. To-night I lost all I had ever cared for.'

'I will give you anything I have if you ever want it.'

'No; I want nothing. But never try to know more of me than you do now. Whatever happens to me, I shall like to know that you always believe I am something good. It may save me from becoming so bad as I otherwise might.' She stood up. 'This will seem like a dream to-morrow. The wildest part of all the masquerade.'

'We shall dream it again some day,' said he.

As they stood thus, facing each other, the sound of steps and voices approached the seclusion of the alcove. By a common impulse their hands met for a moment; then they resumed their masks, and so became invisible to one another, save for the outward show that is not reality. They felt a strangeness, the deeper for that strange familiarity which, in the space of a few unpremeditated minutes had begun and ceased. As the other masquers entered, these two passed out and separated, and neither looked to see what course the other took.

Part II.—Prosperity.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

In which Bryan attempts to do Jack a service by preventing him from undertaking a burden; and it is shown how the running of much water cannot wash out blood stains.

Lady Mayfair's masquerade took place on a Friday. On the Monday following Sinclair accompanied Jack to the place of embarcation; and Tom Berne was in attendance on his master.

Some hours were still to pass before the steamer sailed. There was an inn not far from the wharf, to which the party repaired. Jack's luggage having been sent on board, Bryan ordered dinner. It was served in a small parlour on the first floor, overlooking the quay. While it was getting ready, Bryan sat at the open window, while Jack paced up and down the room, occasionally pausing to send a glance towards the vessel that was to take him away. The neighbourhood was not an especially savoury one. The adjoining houses were used partly as shops for the sale of marine stores, and partly as sailors' lodgings. The street was roughly paved and ill-kept, and was shuffled over by the feet of tipsy seamen and professional blackguards. A wrangling dispute was going on in the bar-room of the inn; occasionally an oath or two would find its way up to the parlour window. Policemen were scanty; it was hardly worth while to protect such people as these against one another. It would have been easy to find a place almost as handy to the quay, and much more respectable; but Bryan, who professed familiarity with the locality, had recommended 'The Silver Anchor,' and Jack had offered no objection. Indeed, he was so engrossed with thoughts of what lay before him, that he paid little heed to his surroundings.

'Anxious to be off, eh?' said Bryan, thrusting his hands in his pockets and stretching out his legs. 'Tired of England in two months?'

'I mean to come back again when I've got what I'm going for.'

'Still convinced you'll get it, eh, in spite of all my warnings? I tell you again, you'll be disappointed. I know quite as much about the business as your mysterious informant—who, by-the-bye, is not such a mystery to me as you imagine. Hear reason, Jack, though at

the eleventh hour. If those papers had been in existence, they'd have turned up long ago. And without them where are you? Much better stay where you are. Eh?—come now!'

'I shall find them,' said Jack, with undisturbed confidence. 'Some one has been keeping them for me—my grandfather, I suppose. When he found that I had run away that night, he hid the papers, and is waiting till I come back. I shall be Baron Castlemere.'

'Ah, this is some of your confounded clairvoyance again. You've been seeing visions and dreaming dreams. If that's the case, you're past argument. Now, what if I should take a leaf out of your book, and prophesy your death with a hole through your head? That's what you did to me not so very long ago. Would that make you reconsider your rash purpose? Suppose I say, if you start on this wild-goose chase, you'll never get back alive?'

'The Baron Castlemere will get back alive,' he said.

'What the deuce has given you this sudden hankering after greatness?' resumed Bryan, after a pause. 'A few weeks ago you were an arrant republican, if not a communist. Now nothing will satisfy you but to join the English aristocracy. Why not stick to your clay, man? Any fool can be an English nobleman, if he happens to be born in the right place; but nobody but you can be Jack the animal sculptor. You can get fame and profit, and all the world will talk of you; but as Baron Castlemere you'll be a big nobody with thirty thousand a year. What's got into you!'

Jack seated himself on the window-sill and folded his arms.

'I'm not the same that I was,' he said. 'When I thought I was the son of nobody, I could do what I liked. But now, I'm not myself—I am all my ancestors. Everything is changed.'

'You would find things more changed than you imagine, if you became a baron,' Bryan remarked. 'A sculptor may have friends, but a baron not. I, for one, should be no friend of Baron Castlemere. A month ago I'd have given ten thousand pounds to do you a good turn; but I wouldn't turn on my heel to oblige Baron Castlemere. He doesn't interest me. Perhaps he's in my way. If you stood between me and a fortune, Jack, I'd let the fortune go; but if the baron interfered with me, I'd get rid of him. There's a fair warning for you!'

'I cannot change what is changed,' said Jack.

The door opened, and a servant brought in dinner. Bryan told the man he need not wait; and when the two were alone again, he stood up and held out his hand.

'Good-bye, Jack, my man,' he said.

'It isn't time for that yet,' said the other, surprised, but giving his hand nevertheless.

'Full time, Jack. It's to my old friend Jack I say good-bye, not to the baron. The baron be damned. Jack, I never cared for a man as I cared for you, and I never shall again. If it had gone on, I might have ended with being canonised! So it's about time it stopped.

Good-bye, old fellow; I don't blame you, and don't you blame me. It's fate—we can't help it. This is the last dinner we shall ever eat together.' He gave Jack's hand a powerful gripe, and let it go. At the same time he cast aside his grim and grave bearing—which, indeed, was at variance with his customary demeanour—and exclaimed in his semi-jocose tone, 'Now for victuals! We may talk as we like about society and the soul, but there's nothing in creation equal to a good dinner!'

They took their places at table, and Bryan was as genial and entertaining as only he could be when he laid himself out for it. His mental scenery was naturally warm and attractive in tone, and memory had enriched it with innumerable striking and amusing episodes from his past career. He rattled on, laughing himself, and making Jack laugh, saying any quantity of clever things, and treating life as if it were a game of billiards or a 'Haymarket' comedy. There were a couple of bottles of excellent claret on the board, which Bryan had taken the precaution to bring with him; and he was careful to see that Jack's glass was never empty. 'Nothing like smooth claret to counteract rough water,' he observed. 'Ah, Jack, how comfortably a man might go to heaven with a quart or so of this good stuff beneath his belt! "Now to die were now to be most happy!" as your friend Othello remarked. What do you say?'

Before Jack could reply, the door partly opened, and Tom Berne's unconciliating visage appeared through the aperture.

'Might I speak a word with 'ee, sir?' he said to his master.

'What the devil have you come bothering about?' demanded Bryan sharply. He got up, however, and went to the door, and after a moment passed out, and closed it behind him. For a minute or two Jack was left alone. Then Bryan came back and reseated himself at the table.

'Only some of the fool's nonsense,' he said, casting a peculiar fixed glance at his companion. 'It's remarkable, though, what weight fools have in this world. They are the tyrants of wise men, and engines of destruction to everybody. That fellow, for example, was as much my slave as one creature can be the slave of another; and yet the very abjectness of his slavery makes him my master. He'll do anything I tell him, except the one thing I really want him to do—leave me; and I can't put him out of the way by murdering him, because, if I'm to be hanged, I can't afford to throw myself away upon such a *corpus delicti* as he. But that isn't all.' Here Bryan interrupted himself, and poured out the last of the bottle into his own and his friend's glasses. 'I drink to you, Jack,' he said; 'may the life which is before you be an improvement on the life you leave behind!' He emptied his glass and set it down.

'I may as well say it out,' he resumed presently, in a heavier and slower tone. 'I can draw a moral from myself as easily as from another man. You and I shall part soon, not to meet again, probably. You know the old fable about raising the devil and being unable to lay

him again. You must find occupation for him. That seems easy enough—but the worst of it is, that the fact of the devil's being on hand suggests mischief that you would otherwise never have thought of. You seem to employ him, but really it's he employs you; for you are responsible for whatever he does. Suppose, say, that I have an enemy, and this enemy is bound to beat me. Now, being by nature a pugnacious but amiable man, my natural course under those circumstances would be to use my fists as long as I could, and then to give in. But, as luck will have it, there's a devil in my service who suggests to me (or I suggest to him—it's all one) that I shall turn the tables on my victorious enemy by murdering him. I therefore give orders to my devil (or he makes the offer—it's all one) to compass this murder. The murder is done!' Bryan brought his fist down heavily on the table. 'The devil did it, but it was the devil in me. And the blow was really struck, not against my enemy, but against me—and it's a fatal blow! And the upshot of it is, that not the devil is the slave, but—— Hullo! what's that?'

The noise of voices raised in altercation had been for some moments audible, but just now they burst out louder and more furiously. Bryan left his chair and went to the window. 'It's that scoundrel Tom,' he exclaimed; 'he's drunk again—there'll be mischief directly! Come with me, Jack—quick! come on!'

The wine had kindled Jack's blood, but had not yet dulled his senses. He sprang to his feet and hurried downstairs after Bryan.

A struggle was going on just outside the doorway of the inn. The combatants were Tom Berne and a brawny sailor, with a red shirt and shaggy black hair. The men had been sparring, and the sailor was bleeding at the mouth. A knot of men were looking on, critically; such scenes were too common to arouse any special excitement. Just as Bryan appeared, however, some one called out, 'Look sharp, there! drunken chap's got a pistol!' And immediately there was a scattering back of the spectators. Tom, in fact, had drawn a revolver from a pocket of his coat, and was apparently watching his chance to cock it.

'You trip up the red-shirted fellow, Jack,' Bryan said; 'I'll take care of my man. Now then!'

Jack stepped up to the sailor from behind, took him by the shoulders, twisted him round across his knee, and laid him down gently. Then he stood erect.

Bryan, meanwhile, had rushed at Tom and caught him round the body. There he held him firmly, but seemed unable to throw him, or even to move him. Tom's arms were free; the pistol in his right hand, which was passed over Bryan's left shoulder. The muzzle of the pistol moved until it was in line with the sailor, over whom Jack was standing; then it was lifted a little and discharged.

Jack was bareheaded. Those who happened to be looking at him saw the hair on the right side of his head fly up, as if struck by a sharp blast of wind. At the same instant he staggered, dropped to

his knees, and then sank backwards, his brow and cheek covered with blood. Immediately after the sound of the discharge, Bryan lifted Tom from his feet like a child, and dashed him heavily to the earth.

'You'd ought to 'a done that afore, sir,' said a bystander; 'he's been and potted the wrong man. Dang they pistols, anyhow!'

Bryan turned slowly, saw Jack lying prostrate and bloody, and, standing still, asked—

'Is he dead?'

'Looks uncommon like it,' observed a critic. 'Pal o' yours, sir?'

''Taint only manslaughter, arter all,' put in another. ''Twas t' other cove 'e aimed at. That's the worst o' they blasted pistols. Knives is just as safe, and don't make no mistakes. Well, Mike Smith saved his bacon, howsumdever.'

'You say it was an accident, then?' said Bryan, whose face was quite white, while his eyes avoided Jack's prostrate figure, and wandered from one to another of the surrounding group. 'You're all sure of that? You saw it—I didn't.'

'Ay, sir—you won't get 'im 'ung for that—six months in quod, maybe'—were the responses of the spectators. 'You giv' it 'im pretty 'earty yourself, sir,' added one, referring to the seemingly inanimate condition of Tom, who had not stirred since Bryan threw him.

The attention of the group being thus drawn to a new object, Jack was, for the moment, left alone. Bryan approached him. After a brief hesitation he knelt beside him and raised his head on his arm. The position reminded him of their first meeting in California.

'The game is not worth the candle,' muttered Bryan to himself. 'I wish he were alive again, baron or not. Great God!—he is alive!' These words were whispered, and were accompanied by a strong convulsive tremor, which shook Bryan to the marrow of his bones. Jack had opened his eyes, sighed, and let the lids fall again. The bullet had but grazed the skull, stunning, not killing him. Bryan glanced up, no one was looking at them. His hand went lightly to Jack's throat; a little pressure there would still suffice. Bryan took his hand away, and shouted at the top of his voice, 'Great God! he's alive!'

'So's this 'un, too,' came from the group around Tom. ''Ere's a rum go! nobody hinjured after all! An' us has been a wastin' all this val'able time over 'em! Cheese it, mates! 'ere comes the bobbies!'

. . . . . .

It lacked still an hour of the time advertised for Jack's steamer to sail, and he had little difficulty in getting aboard in season. His recollection of what had occurred was naturally rather confused; and the loss of blood gave him a feeling of languor. 'You were in luck, my man, as usual,' were Bryan's last words to him as they parted at the gangway; 'but never try to stop a bullet with your head again.'

Jack watched his friend's departure pensively. His vague impression was that Bryan had somehow saved his life. At all events, he had dressed his wound with the skill and with more than the

tenderness of a trained surgeon. As for that poor drunken reprobate, Tom, it was only at Jack's special intercession that Bryan had consented not to prosecute him for attempted murder. Well, death was a strange country; the world was worth staying in. It was a new world now. As the steamer left the harbour, and faced the western waves, Jack sought his berth and fell asleep. But his rest was disturbed. He dreamed of a masquerade in the Sacramento valley; he held some one by the hand—a woman, with soft black hair and a melodious voice; but her features were concealed by a mask. Then he snatched the mask away; but, with a cry, he saw, not the face he had expected, but the reproachful countenance of Kooahi. Then an explosion rent the air; something rushed down upon him; he strove to escape, but could not; he fell, and a vast weight crushed down upon him, and he knew that he was buried beneath the Witch's Head. He struggled desperately; and, with a peal of harsh laughter in his ears that sounded like Bryan's, he awoke. The vessel was labouring in a heavy sea, the timbers creaked and groaned, and there was a throbbing pain in his head. Looking out of his port-hole window, he saw the moon shining athwart the tumultuous waters, and tall waves hurrying by in ragged haste, and lifting ghostly hands, and vanishing for ever. At last he slept again, and this time dreamlessly.

. . . . . .

The modest but deserving village of Suncook had, during these latter years, begun to look up in the world. Its harbour had been improved, its trade increased, and its population augmented. A rival hotel and several handsome private dwellings had been put up. A contractor had entered into negotiations for the building of a town-hall on the site now occupied by the old red house beneath the elm; and the work was to be begun as soon as the present occupant should vacate the premises. And that was an event that had been for some time past expected, and might now occur any day; for the occupant in question lay upon his deathbed. Old Mossy Jakes, after holding on to life with a dreary tenacity that had wearied his most unexacting friends, was at last sinking away into the inoffensiveness of death; he was dying, and with the hope of his latter days unrealised. A crazy and groundless hope it had been, as ever fretful senility was deluded by. An English lord, his grandson—Heaven save the mark!—was to come to Suncook, and declare himself, and receive Mossy Jakes's blessing. Nor was this all; the lordly grandson was to turn out to be identical with a certain worthless scamp of a half wild urchin, who, years ago, had lived in the neighbouring woods somewhere; until (as was generally believed) he one day was guilty of some escapade which made it necessary for him to escape punishment by shipping as cabin-boy aboard a West Indian trader lying at Newburyport. He had not since been heard of, and it was to be hoped he never would be; yet it was no less a personage than this that poor Mossy Jakes had made the hero of his crazy dream. Well, well; the graveyard would soon see the end of it; and meanwhile—patience!

It was a morning in early June, and Suncook and its environs were at their loveliest. The season had been a late one, and the trees were in the first green freshness of their beauty. Blue birds, with a flash of sky on their backs, were glancing from thicket to thicket. There were blackbirds about who could alternate their croakings with divine singing when they chose. High aloft, an eagle was wheeling meditatively between the forest below and the azure above. Here and there, from points of vantage, lines of sparkling ocean could be discerned through the happy foliage. Hares and striped chipmonks cantered and scudded amidst the huckleberry bushes and along the out-cropping ledges of rock. And down the shadowy length of the winding ravine the twinkling brook wandered and delayed, and kicked up its baby heels over the stones. Jack, as he trod along the margin, with his oaken staff in his hand, was continually marvelling at the unchanged aspect of this home of his boyhood, when, with the boy whose home it had been, so much was changed. By-and-by, however, he came upon something that was manifestly new—a flat stake, driven firmly into the ground, and painted white, with some numbers and letters inscribed upon it. It was a surveyor's mark, and indicated that some engineering operation was in contemplation here. In fact, a road was being laid out, which, for a considerable distance, was to follow the course of the ravine. After proceeding about a quarter of a mile further, Jack came upon unmistakable signs of the progress of the work.

A group of about a dozen men, most of them labourers with their shirt-sleeves rolled up over their brown elbows, were busy over a huge boulder, which lay in the very centre of the gorge, and was evidently an obstacle in the way of the further development of the road. Jack knew the boulder only too well; he was the only human being—save two—who had been present when it assumed its present position. He approached one of the men, who was standing apart from the others and directing them, and, after exchanging greetings with him, inquired what was being done.

'Well, sir, we're going to try and get that darned old lump out of the way,' the overseer replied. 'She's too heavy to lift, and she's too high to crawl over; so we're going to try powder. I guess that'll do the job, if anything can.'

'How did it get there?' Jack asked.

'Get there? Well, it growed there, I expect,' the man replied, pushing back his straw hat and staring at the new comer. 'It was before your time, I guess, or mine either.'

'That's all you know about it, Silas Clarke,' remarked another personage, who seemed to be in attendance merely as a spectator. 'You ain't a Suncook man, or you'd 'a' known it fell down there a matter of nine or ten years ago. It used to be perched up in front of the little cave yonder. It's a queer thing now,' he continued, addressing himself obliquely to Jack, and pulling at the straw-coloured beard on his chin, 'that cave was the home of a little chap—Jack they

called him—a sort of half-wild little coon, that nobody know'd much about. And they do say—some of the folks hereabout—that when the stone toppled over, it caught him underneath, and that his bones are lying there at this minute.'

'I guess it would take a pretty fair team of horses to draw that long-bow of yourn, Minot,' observed Mr. Clarke, with grave sarcasm. 'You've got a sight of elbow-grease, for a thin man.'

'You go 'long!' responded Minot, plucking a twig and chewing it. 'All I know is, the little chap's never been seen nor heard of from then to now; and there was some would have set store by finding him, too; ask Mossy Jakes if there wa'n't.'

'Does Mossy Jakes still live in the red house?' Jack asked.

'I expect he won't live there long; but he'll live there till he dies, any way,' answered Minot sententiously; and then he added, with a more searching glance, 'Ever been in these parts before, sir? I don't seem to recollect your features.'

'Not for a good many years,' said Jack, who recollected Minot well enough. 'How soon will this blast come off?' he inquired, turning to Clarke.

'In about three minutes, I guess,' replied that gentleman. 'Maybe you'd like to stay, sir, and see if the bones of that little chap of Minot's are all right. How's that, Minot?'

'Oh, you go 'long!' said Minot; 'it ain't my story, any way.'

Jack had reasons of his own for wishing to see the result of the blast; although he certainly did not expect to find the bones of 'Minot's little chap' underneath the boulder. The preparations being now completed, he withdrew with the others to the place of shelter that had been prepared, and waited.

After a short interval, a sudden rumble, accompanied by a perceptible shock, was heard; and fragments of granite fell round about. 'Hold on!' exclaimed Clarke; 'she's bored in three places.' Almost as he spoke, two other explosions occurred almost simultaneously; and then the whole party issued forth to view the result. Jack, though the most eager, held back the longest.

'By thunder, Minot!' he heard Clarke exclaim, 'here is something, sure enough! Wait till the mud clears away. Well—darn my skin!'

Jack pressed forward, feeling himself hot and tremulous. The other men were bending down and staring into the bed of the brook, with various expressions of curiosity and interest. The blast had completely dispersed the boulder, fragments of which were lying confusedly about. The pool which had been formed above it had, of course, subsided, and the water ran only a few inches in depth. There, upon the rocky bottom, lay extended the bare skeleton and grinning skull of what had once been a human being. Some of the bones were crushed, and all were slimy and brown with a downy growth of water-moss. Some shreds of what had perhaps been clothing were loosened by the current, and floated away. There it

lay, motionless, yet seeming to quiver and shake by reason of the eddying of the water above it. It was an uncanny spectacle.

'He's been there a good spell, and no one the wiser,' observed one of the men.

'He wasn't no boy,' said Clarke. 'Look at the length of him. And there's four or five teeth gone in his jaw, too. Who can he have been, I'd like to know!'

'What's that thing between his ribs there?' said Minot.

Jack thrust his hand into the water, and took the thing out. It had lain where the man's heart had formerly been; but it was formed of an even tougher and more impenetrable substance. As far as could be seen, it was an oblong box of some metal not subject to corrosion. It was fastened by a clasp, on which were deeply engraven the initials M. V.

'I have seen this box before,' he said. 'It belonged to a man named Murdoch Vivian. There are his initials. He was a relative of mine, and he disappeared about nine years ago.'

'Murdoch Vivian! do tell!' exclaimed Minot. 'Why, that's the chap old Mossy Jakes has been carryin' on about all this while. Said he stole his papers. Maybe they're in that box.'

'Then the box must be taken to him, and he must open it,' Jack said. 'Mr. Clarke, if you and Minot will come with me, I'll take it to him. I have come from England on purpose to see him. And if the papers you speak of are in this box, they probably are the ones that I came to speak to him about.'

'And what might your name be, sir, if you please?' demanded Clarke, with a keen look.

'My name is John Vivian,' answered he, in a firm voice, that all could hear. 'And Murdoch Vivian was my father's brother.'

'Well, I read a thing that was called a novel, once,' observed Minot, in a meditative voice; 'but darned if this don't beat it all hollow!'

The conversation went on for some time. Jack listened and spoke with a quietness and self-possession that might have astonished himself, if he had been at leisure to criticise his own conduct. But that conduct was so purely superficial, and at so immeasurable a distance from the movement of his really vital thoughts and feelings, as to be practically in another sphere of existence. Somewhere in the hidden recesses of his soul, he was hearing a voice, with an unpleasant ring in it, say, '——Do you wait here, while I climb up and see——' and then a deafening burst of sound, followed by a more terrible silence; and by an awful doubt, that had lasted nigh ten years; but which was at rest for ever now! He might be John, fourteenth Baron Castlemere, now; but on the name, and on the lands and the wealth that went with it, would rest henceforth the indelible stain of his uncle's blood. No one save himself would see it or suspect it; but there it would remain, with whatever curse it might bring with it.

Events succeeded one another in an effortless, mechanical fashion;

he seemed to have known it all before. His inward preoccupation prevented his feeling or expressing any outward surprise or emotion; and yet he was brought face to face with things which, at another time, would deeply have moved him. He came to the little red house beneath the elm, which seemed much smaller than when he had known it before; and he stood in the low-ceiled bedroom upstairs—the room in which he had been born. There lay a withered and shrunken old man, sharp-featured, with thin white hair and strange peering black eyes, deeply sunken in their sockets; and bony, fumbling hands, that moved restlessly and plucked at the coverlet. Many things were asked and answered; things of the utmost importance, no doubt; but to Jack they were like a drama that he himself had composed, and the end of which he knew. It was all strange enough, of course; but with an unreal strangeness, like that of a tale which one holds in one's hand, knowing that the entanglement is explained and finished on the last page. He was telling the story of his life since he disappeared from Suncook; he was identifying himself, or being identified, by this or that link in the chain of evidence; the lawyer was writing it down, pausing now and then with the pen suspended over the paper; the black-eyed old man dying, yet intensely alive, was listening, interpolating, complaining, triumphing. Was it a play, or a dream, or a reality? There was reality somewhere—of that he was certain; but this laborious routine, where everything must follow on in due order and succession, instead of being simultaneously present to consciousness—this, surely, was but the merest phantom or symbol of reality. The end was already there—had always been there; why go this weary way about to reach it? John, Baron Castlemere: there was a fact, plain and palpable enough, one would think! Well, at last the end would be reached; and at last it was reached. 'You are he who was known as Jack; the son of Annette and Floyd Vivian, born in lawful wedlock; you are John, Baron Castlemere, heir to such and such estates. These are the attesting documents, strangely preserved through all these years by him who purposed to destroy them. This is your grandfather, who brought you up, who loved and hated you, whom you knew familiarly, yet never knew. This is——' This is your right hand, and this is your left hand! What need of more words? And now you must bid farewell—an eternal farewell—to this same grandfather, who has lived only to see this hour, and who now dies in such peace and comfort as he may. Follow him to the grave beside his long-buried daughter, on the slope against the sea. Wear mourning, and be solemn, for Time is stage-manager of this terrestrial theatre, and gives us cues when we must weep or laugh. And, oh, how palpable and visible our masks and our stage-dresses are, and how inscrutable and unattainable are ourselves who are thus masked and costumed! What is the use and significance of this hackneyed procession, whereof one end is called youth, and the other age. And who, since the beginning of the world, has ever spoken a

true word to his fellow, and revealed the secret of his heart and the thought of his soul? What audience, with what scorn or pity, beholds our mummeries and listens to our chatter of parrots and monkeys? Is Luck our God? and how shall He be worshipped?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In which Sir Stanhope Maurice makes two offers; one of which is refused, and the other is accepted.

SIR STANHOPE MAURICE had certainly a claim to the title of a man who has had losses. He was a methodical and a resolute personage, born with a healthy conviction of his own good judgment and rectitude, and deficient only in this—that he never originated an idea, and always (though quite unconsciously) took his initiative in thought or action from some one else. But when he had committed himself to any view, or line of conduct, he would stick to it with a rare inflexible determination, which (since nothing of human devising is infallible) was likelier to lead to discomfiture than a more plastic frame of mind would have been. Sir Stanhope, at all events, was fated to suffer discomfiture oftener than was consistent with his notions of Providential impartiality. It was difficult for him to believe that he had been wrong, but the idea that he had been wronged more easily commended itself to him. What has been termed by some philosophers the natural cussedness of things, formed, as his misfortunes multiplied, an ever-strengthening element in his view of the world. He was not kindly disposed towards trouble; conscious of his own honest merit and moral orthodoxy, he was adverse from admitting that he was obnoxious to chastisement. But the persistence of undeserved calamity produces philosophic bewilderment; and by degrees Stanhope found himself reproachfully mistrusting those anchors of faith and hope on which he had been taught implicitly to depend. He was hovering anxiously upon the verge of the quaint conviction that a Providence which allowed the just to suffer without compensation, could not be a just Providence. His moroseness was augmented by the operation of a sullen pride, which forbade him to invite the commiseration or assistance of his fellow-men. The mining craze with which the jocund eloquence of Sinclair had inspired him had swallowed up all his ready money, most of his investments, and not a little of his hereditary possessions; but it had not visibly shaken his determination to believe that the enterprise was a wise one, and that Sinclair and he had consequently been wise in respectively advocating and prosecuting it. A little more capital would set all right; but where was it to come from? There were friends who might have advanced a loan; but to have asked for it would have implied an admission of error or miscalculation, which was inadmissible. For some people it is easier to

die of a mistake than to acknowledge it. Stanhope, accordingly, who in the days of his prosperity had looked forward to a union with Madeleine as among the blessed certainties of his career, found himself parted from her by adversity—not that he loved her less, but that he feared lest his motives in courting her should be misinterpreted. With a sense of gloomy dignity he told himself that he would rather starve than be under obligations to his wife for bread; and it afforded him a certain sombre satisfaction to meet the contrary persuasions of Kate Roland with an unreasoning refusal. He made arrangements to leave England—having first established his mother in a secure and comfortable position; and such was his predicament at the time of the Mayfair masquerade.

But there circumstances worked in him an important and unexpected change. Madeleine's intimation that his absence would be unwelcome to her, combined with the discovery that Sinclair had been playing a double game with him in respect of his relations to her, threw a new light upon the situation. If Sinclair had deceived him here—if, under cover of aiding and abetting his suit to Madeleine, he had really been making love to her himself—why might not the same Sinclair have deceived him likewise with regard to the mines? But in that case, Stanhope's self-respect was no longer involved in affirming the respectability of the mines; he might openly abandon them; and again, the fact that a rival had been tampering with his mistress was in the way of being an obligation upon her true lover to avouch his love. To give a woman up from a superfine sense of delicacy is one thing; to surrender her to the unauthorised clutches of another man, is something altogether different; and Stanhope, as we have seen, lost no time in deciding that he would not take the latter course. It was true that her encouragement of him had not been very pronounced; but more was hardly to be expected at this stage. Stanhope's antipodean schemes retired promptly into the background; and he prepared to do what he should have been doing any time during the last twelvemonth, if he had not been an ass.

It was with a feeling of lofty recklessness, tempered by an ample share of genuine lover's fervour and humility, that he presented himself before Madeleine, soon after his parting with her at the masquerade. The young lady had been expecting him, and had, perhaps, had her own notions as to the probable result of the interview; but, as often happens with youthful heroines, she had been dwelling too much upon what she herself was going to say and think, to leave other than a colourless and echo-like *rôle* to her interlocutor. The oldest and wisest of us, however, never fully succeed in forecasting the disturbance which an actual human being is sure to make in our neat, self-possessed, and artistically conducted dialogues of the imagination.

Stanhope, for example, after taking in his own the hand of Madeleine, who looked darkly pale in a feathery white dress, began by saying—'Whom do you think I met just now in Bond Street?'

The question drove out of Madeleine's head the opening passages of the interview as she had planned it, and she was impelled to say, quite prosaically—

'Who?'

'Sinclair,' replied Stanhope, turning to deposit his hat and cane on the sofa, and then facing her with a solemn expression. 'He addressed me, but I took no notice of him.'

'How—strange!' she ejaculated. She had 'absurd' on the tip of her tongue; and, indeed, inwardly smiled at the idea of a man like Stanhope ignoring a man like Sinclair. It was somewhat as if a match-box were to cut a man-of-war. So great was her estimate of the red-bearded freebooter, though she raged against him now.

'It was a terrible step to take,' continued Stanhope, who was apt to use impressive adjectives. 'But he has betrayed my confidence, and I can never accept his hand again. No man ever had a truer friend than Bryan—than Sinclair had in me; and this is the end of it! He has led me to throw away my property; and he was trying to rob me of my—I mean of your——'

'Won't you sit down?' said Madeleine. She leaned her cheek on her closed hand, and added—

'He only used me as I deserved.'

'No, no,' Stanhope exclaimed. 'He deceived you, and every one else.'

'I deceived myself in supposing that he could really care for me.'

'He cares for nothing but himself.'

'That is all any one cares for.'

'Not I,' said Stanhope, reddening.

'I believe still that he did care for me,' resumed Madeleine, stultifying herself. 'You cannot comprehend a man like him. He is not like others. And there is some mystery.'

'A mystery about what?'

'I was going to tell you all I know; you may know things about him that I do not, that may help to explain. We—he spoke to me long ago; even long before he went to America. No, you needn't abuse him; I kept it secret as much as he did, and deceived everybody just as much. If he was wicked, so was I.'

'You didn't make people believe that you loved any one else,' broke out Stanhope; 'but one of the last things that he said to me before going away was that——'

'He did not tell you that he loved any other woman?' said Madeleine, lifting her head menacingly.

'He said what amounted to the same thing—that he hoped I would marry you immediately. He made me believe that he was taking my part with you.'

'I can forgive him for that—that's a very different thing,' rejoined she, leaning back again with a momentary smile. 'It was necessary that no one should suspect.'

'I see no such necessity. Why shouldn't he have declared himself openly?'

'We thought it was best not. He was poor, and people would have said he was a fortune-hunter; and we should have been kept apart, and troubled.'

'Well, it's no wonder he was afraid of being called a fortune-hunter.'

'I hope you will not be so foolish as to call him one. If he was a fortune-hunter then, why isn't he one now?'

'I don't understand you. You say you have found out that he has been deceiving you; but I don't suppose he meant that you should find it out?'

'He could not have spoken otherwise if he had meant it.'

'Why, you don't mean to say that he——'

'Jilted me? Yes, that is exactly what I mean,' said Madeleine, smiling again. 'Of course there's no reason why I should not be jilted, as well as any other girl. But there is some mystery about this. When he went away he promised to be back within a year; and he kept his promise. But it was understood—at least I thought so—that after that there was to be no more concealment. Our engagement was to be made known. So he called here, and Kate was in the room; I would not let her go out. I expected that he would say, before her and before everybody, that he loved me, and that I was to be his wife. But he didn't, and then I was angry and indignant, and I would have nothing to say to him. And I wouldn't see him alone when he came afterwards; I was determined he should never have me unless he claimed me openly; because I shall soon be my own mistress now, and he has made money of his own—enough to justify him in asking for me. But he seemed to want to speak to me privately, and to go on as we did before; he asked if I were not going to the masquerade; and I had intended to go, but then I said I would not. However, at the very last I made up my mind that I would go, though neither he nor Kate should know it. So I dressed at my aunt's, and went. But Kate found it out, and came after me; and he mistook her for me, and proposed to be secretly married. So far there is no mystery. But when Kate told me what he had said, and that she made him believe I refused him, I was angry with her for coming between us; and then I went to him and told him the mistake he had made, and I told him why I had behaved so coldly to him; and I humbled myself before him, and said—I said everything that a woman can say to the man she loves.'

Here Madeleine turned aside, and rested her arms upon the table beside her, and hid her face upon them. She had spoken quietly, and even indifferently, until the last sentences, when she suddenly faltered and broke down. There is no pity like self-pity.

As for Stanhope, he began to entertain a misgiving that Bryan, as a rival, was not altogether disposed of yet. He loved Madeleine more ardently but less hopefully than ever heretofore. His anxiety

to know the upshot of her story, however, was too pressing to endure delay.

'How did he answer you?' he demanded.

Madeleine did not reply for at least a minute. At last she raised her head, looked at Stanhope with heavy eyes, and said—

'He made no answer that I expected. It was not a quarter of an hour since he had proposed that thing to Kate, thinking she was I.'

'I can't see through that; the man must be crazy!' exclaimed Stanhope, knitting his brows. 'Unless he thought that you and Kate were in league to mislead him?'

Madeleine merely shook her head; she had reason, perhaps, for knowing the groundlessness of this suggestion. Hereupon ensued a depressing and unquiet pause. Then Stanhope, who had not called upon Madeleine for the purpose of discussing his rival's eccentricities, felt that the time had come when he must strike in his own cause, if ever he were going to do so. As he fixed his eyes upon her with this thought in his mind, the profound sadness of her face and attitude struck him with something akin to dismay. Had he or any man so much power to do her good, as this false friend and heartless lover had had to do her harm? When he considered his own love for her in its relation to the energies of heart and mind with which nature had endowed him, it seemed immense and irresistible; but when he reflected on the feat it must perform in making this heart-sore girl forget an unworthy passion and embrace an honest one, it assumed a much less efficient aspect. So much easier is it to shatter the golden bowl than to repair it!

He got up from his chair, went over and stood beside her, and said—

'Madeleine, can you bear to let me love you?'

She glanced at him with a certain wistfulness. His appeal had been well made; but as she contemplated the compact, grave figure of the honourable little baronet, she sighed at not finding him more heroic. She would, perhaps, have been glad to yield, could she have felt the attack of a champion strong enough to conquer her; but to be obliged to be herself that champion—to help her lover to woo her fiercely enough to make her surrender herself to his desire—this was requiring too much.

'You are very different from him,' she at length remarked, not quite regretfully, but as if recognising an important and hitherto unconsidered fact.

'There is only one way in which I could wish to be like him,' was Stanhope's reply, in a tone which meant, 'Let me be like him in winning your love, and I am content to be unlike him in deserving it.'

'It's not your being like him that would help me to care for you,' said Madeleine; 'if I could ever care for any one, it would be for some one as different from him as day from night. But then the difference . . . must be of the right kind!'

'I don't know what—what is in your mind,' said poor Stanhope.

Now, oddly enough, Madeleine's mind was at that moment occupied with the vision of a tall, gallant-looking figure, with a broad white forehead, and dreamy, yet penetrating brown eyes; a figure in the garb of a troubadour, and in all respects such as might have stepped out of the pages of mediæval romance. This vision was undoubtedly very unlike Sinclair, and as little resembled Stanhope. How it happened to present itself before Madeleine's mental eyesight at this juncture, and with what favour or disfavour she regarded it, she did not declare; nor, indeed, did she make any direct allusion to it whatever. But presently she said—

'I'm afraid it would be no use, Stanhope. I might marry you, but I can't think of myself as your wife. A woman, you see, cannot be made a wife by just marrying her! If I were to marry you, it would be only to make Bryan think that I had forgotten him.'

'You are too young to say you never can love again.'

'I did not say that,' returned Madeleine; and once more the mediæval vision passed before her. 'I might love some one else, perhaps, sometime——'

'Well then——' began the wooer eagerly; but Madeleine went on—

'It would not be you. I don't know why, Stanhope; but it is so. If I could do it, of course I would; I see that it would be sensible and safe; and I would do almost anything not to have him think that he can break my heart. But a woman can love a man only in two ways—either as I love Bryan, or—in some other very different way that I can't describe. If I loved you, it would have to be in the same way that I loved Bryan, and that's impossible. I like you too much; and—I suppose I know you too well!'

This explanation was for the most part a riddle to Stanhope; but Madeleine's demeanour, with its fatal calm and kindliness, was only too easy to understand. She could discourse upon the subject most vital to his happiness as composedly as if it were a question of matching knitting-yarns. She was languid; the subject hardly interested her.

'I am very unlucky!' said he. He was not accustomed to express despair and passion, but he did not on that account the less feel those emotions; and his tone evidenced something of what his words did not convey. It stirred Madeleine's compassion, if not her remorse.

'If I had made the world,' she said, 'I would have made love always come on both sides, when it came at all. If I had known the other night how hopeless this was, I would not have said to you what I did—I wouldn't have asked you not to go to America. But, after all, I am very lonely now; I seem to have nothing left.'

'Can't I even do anything for you, Madeleine?' demanded Stanhope, with an impulse of manly generosity that was worth a great deal of love-making. 'Is there nothing you wish that I might help you to? I should be glad if I could be of some use!'

She looked away, chafing one hand over the other upon her knee, and did not immediately reply. But her bosom heaved; some thought was working in her.

'You would not hesitate to tell me?' Stanhope persisted.

'You are tempting me to ask you something I ought not!' she finally said.

'Let me judge of that.'

She rose up, with her hands twisted tightly together, and her eyes large and bright.

'It's only my curiosity, I suppose,' she said in an uncertain voice. 'I cannot be satisfied till I know. There must be some reason for it. Men do not act so for nothing.'

'What have I done?'

'I mean—Bryan Sinclair.'

'Oh, Bryan! We have both of us done with him.'

'It may not be so bad as it seems!' rejoined she, facing him with a gesture of restrained passion. 'If I could only know! How can he have changed so suddenly—all in a minute? If you had known how he—what we were to each other, you would say it was impossible. I could bear any certainty better than a doubt! Nothing wastes life so much as that!'

'It is better not to know some things too well,' replied Stanhope, gravely. 'If you knew what it was that made him false to you, it might appear worse than it does now.'

'No, no, Stanhope! If I were certain that he was absolutely worthless, of course I should—I might forget him at once, and never think of him any more. But now, I shall always be wondering whether, perhaps—I might not have been somehow in the wrong—too hasty; it is so easy to have misunderstandings when there is so much love!'

'If you have any reason to think that you have been mistaken—' began Stanhope, much disturbed; 'if this was only a quarrel between you——'

'No, no! I have told you all there was—all that I know or can imagine. But I cannot help the thought that he may be keeping something back—or that somebody may have told him something about me that is not true. I suppose I have enemies; every one must have!'

'Then you hope to be reconciled with him again?'

'No, I don't hope that—at least I don't expect it. I only want to be sure—that that could never be. Stanhope, I know I have no right to ask you to help me; but whom have I in the world? What can I do?'

'I will help you all I can, Madeleine—you needn't doubt that. Only let me know exactly what you wish to be done.' Stanhope said this with an air of manly self-possession that was not without its effect upon the girl, who was now almost beyond her own control; and he added, with a touch of egotism that was not ignoble, 'You

may trust to me as a gentleman, though you can't love me. And I would rather be a gentleman whom you could trust, than a scoundrel who had won your love.'

If Madeleine had heard this sentiment uttered upon the stage, she would probably have appreciated it more than she was able to do now.

'It is because he may not be what you think that I want you to speak to him,' she said appealingly. 'You can find out the truth if you will. Oh! if you would, I would thank you with all my heart, whatever the truth may be! I do trust you more than I trust anybody! Find out what is the matter! You don't know how wretched I am!'

'Don't feel so, Madeleine—don't be so excited. Do you wish him to know that I come from you?'

'Do you think that would be best? You must do as you think right. Perhaps you had better not let him know—at least, unless it turns out to have been a misunderstanding. Do you despise me, Stanhope? I despise myself!'

'I would not allow any one else to say that of you,' returned the baronet, grandly. 'Well, I'll go to him, and do my best to—to make you lost to me. You shall see, at all events, that my love is unselfish. I can say truly, Madeleine, that I hope it will turn out to have been a misunderstanding. I would rather lose you, knowing that Bryan was true and you happy, than possess you, and know that you were miserable and he false. Well, I will go now.' He walked to the sofa and picked up his hat and stick; then returned, holding out his hand. 'Good-bye,' he said, in a steady voice, though his eyes were glistening. 'I will come back as soon as I have seen him, and tell you about it—or you shall hear from me at any rate.'

'Come and tell me yourself, Stanhope, if there is no good news,' she said, letting her hand stay in his, and looking steadfastly at him. 'You are kinder and nobler than I believed possible. I said just now that I knew you too well; but it is not so, I didn't know you well enough.'

'And if the news is good?'

Madeleine hesitated; her eyelids fell, colour mounted to her face. After a moment he let go her hand, and stepped back. As she still said nothing, nor looked up, he turned to the door and went out. Virtue is never so exclusively its own reward as when it is practised for the benefit of a rival. But Sir Stanhope Maurice had done a man's part, and felt taller on leaving the house than when he had entered it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

In which the relations of a master and his valet are discussed—and it is shown how the latter's anticipation of the former's wishes may sometimes be objectionable.

THE evolutions and devices of a mind like that of Bryan Sinclair form a subject for analysis more curious, perhaps, than edifying. When all a man's aims in life centre in himself, he is debarred from any other than a merely material progress; the higher order of his faculties does not expand; at most the lower forms of acuteness and readiness are polished, and we find him, as time goes on, either morally or intellectually stationary, or retrograding. He has a revolution upon his own axis, but no orbit, or a very contracted one. To get the better of one's fellows is a religion the severe simplicity of which would be disconcerted by spiritual advancement; and the interest which a life founded upon that religion possesses is due (after the first novelty is over) rather to its relations and collisions with other lives than to anything inherent in itself.

It is to be remembered, however, that no human being can attain to absolute and unexceptionable selfishness. Occasionally he will be inconsistent, and act with some regard to the interests and happiness of other people. Often, too, an act is selfish, or the reverse, not intrinsically, but according to the inscrutable quality of the mental attitude which prompted it. These reservations produce, in practice, that mixedness in human characters which must more or less vitiate any sweeping judgment or generalisation. No man is so bad, so good, or so indifferent as it would be convenient to the epigrammatist to assume. A Frankenstein may be manufactured all of one colour and tendency; but human beings, while they remain in this world, are of the chameleon's dish. Consistency must begin on the other side of the grave.

It was certainly Bryan's business to know what he was about; and yet it may be doubted whether he saw his course clear after his interview with Jack on the night of the masquerade. There had been a time when he was strongly attracted by Madeleine. Beauty, genius, and passion in a woman are a magnet, if anything in nature is so; and then, if more were needed, Madeleine was an heiress. So it was, at all events, that Bryan found it agreeable to make love to her; and his suit prospered. There were moments during his courtship when, had the moment demanded it of him, he would have sacrificed himself for her; when he was so vividly sensible of her maiden freshness and purity as to become noble and chivalrous, and to desire to remain so for her sake. But he had never, either in act or principle, been an ascetic; and loose behaviour bears this punishment—that the memory of it intrudes at seasons which would other-

wise be most sacred and pure, and soils and spoils their sanctity by the gross image of their parody. The frigid ghost of the past mistress drags the husband back to the assignation place, and bids him embrace his present wife there, or not at all. And there is room, between the tenderest meeting of wedded lips, for the whole dreary and foul abyss of incontinent years to yawn and give forth its paralysing exhalation. During the period of courtship these awkward spectres are not so insistent; but their influence is nevertheless to coarsen and shorten love's exquisite interior dawn, when the beloved one seems to the lover like the fragrant angel whose feet are beautiful upon the mountain-tops. Such glorious hallucinations, which are more true than facts, are vouchsafed to sullied souls by glimpses only, or not at all. Bryan, therefore, soon began to regard Madeleine merely as a fine-looking girl, with a fine mind and a fine fortune; and with that his sentiments ceased to be romantic and became practical. She was a splendid and lovely ornament for a man to wear, and solidly useful as well. But he had already lost the power to be made a saint by her.

Nevertheless his aim in life was to enjoy every phase of it, and he was acute enough to perceive that in losing his worship of Madeleine he was losing something which it would have been worth while to retain. In casting about how best he might yet keep it alive he bethought himself of a former scheme of his of visiting California, where, as he had persuaded himself, gold was to be found. Although 'Out of sight out of mind' is a weighty proverb, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' may sometimes be no less true a one, and Bryan determined to make experiment of it. He would thus be killing two or three birds with one stone; for he would have the plunge into unknown regions which his roving instinct occasionally demanded; he would stand the chance of filling his pockets with ready money, of which he was in need; and he would return with a probably undiminished and possibly increased ardour of affection for the girl he intended to marry. Off he went, therefore, and the passion which was kindled at his parting gave him good hopes of finding it in a condition still more inflammable on his return. It was characteristic of him to feel gratified rather than distressed at Madeleine's anguish in being separated from him; not that he wished, in a general way, to see her suffer, but that the relation of her suffering, in this instance, to himself, flattered his self-esteem. During his sojourn abroad he made a feint, as it were, of regularly thinking about Madeleine in a lover-like way; but though he could manage the intellectual part of the business very well, he could not blind himself to the fact that his longings and fond reminiscences had but a small amount of cordial substance in them. The predicament was almost ludicrous; he grinned occasionally at his own plight, but it also annoyed and even disgusted him. For constancy as a virtue he cared nothing, but for constancy as a means of keeping up a certain form of enjoyment he cared much. Moreover he was in the conscious possession of

unusual strength of body, mind, and temper; why then should his emotions and affections not be lasting? To have the force of will to dismiss an undesirable passion was one thing, but to be unable, by force of will, to stick to a passion that was desirable was to admit a lamentable weakness. There is no pleasure to be got out of fickleness; and the suspicion that he was fickle was therefore a humiliation to Bryan. However, he still hoped for the best, and after he and Jack became friends he sometimes spoke to the latter about Madeleine, though never giving her her right name or entering into any verifiable particulars. He fancied that he might thus vivify his feeling towards her. But he was aware of an empty ring in his praises and raptures; he could not talk the love-language of Romeo and of Troilus; he was more apt to fall into the Richard III. vein. When at last he landed in London he felt that his voyage round the earth had brought him no nearer to Madeleine. He had only contrived to prove that he could live without her.

It was still quite possible that the sight of her might revive him, but, because it was a possibility and not a certainty, he delayed a couple of weeks before hazarding it. He was then pleased rather than disconcerted at Kate's presence during the interview; the check gave him something to contend against, and enabled him to figure to himself what protestations he would have made had he and Madeleine been alone. He went away feeling encouraged; she surpassed his anticipations; if he could only be held back from her persistently enough his yearning for her might become satisfactorily intolerable. He was not troubled by her silence and seeming coldness; it was plain enough that she loved him as much or more than ever, and was hurt at his own undemonstrativeness. In the course of the next few days he revolved a new scheme that promised well—that of a secret marriage. Bryan had perhaps read that it was a custom among the Circassians and other semi-civilised tribes to make a profound mystery of their wives, and to visit them only by stealth, like a thief in the night. This custom had a good deal of practical wisdom in it—it kept up the excitement, so to say; and the factitious and imaginary barriers wherewith the wife was surrounded served to endow her with a value independent of her personal attractions. To marry Madeleine surreptitiously, therefore, besides being a sound piece of policy on the financial side, would invest her with the romantic charm of a treasure unlawfully obtained; and since, after the ceremony, she would return to her home and remain in all appearance the same as ever, a vista was opened of unlimited amusing intrigue, of alarms, of expedients, of perilous meetings, of subtle understandings. It was an ingenious and promising device, not unworthy of Bryan's fertile invention. By the time he had perfected it the masquerade was at hand.

Madeleine's pronounced and reiterated refusal to go to the masquerade had gone for nothing with Bryan; he was so full of double meanings himself that he could not help suspecting the presence of some in Madeleine's mind. She wished to throw Kate off the scent;

or to make him anxious, or some such matter. If he was not altogether right in his conclusions he was not (as we have seen) very far wrong. Madeleine did go to the masquerade, but she went in a disguise which she had some justification in believing would prove impenetrable. Bryan was on the look-out, and when the necklace had revealed to him the person whom he supposed to be Madeleine, he lauded himself for his sagacity, and lost no time in making known his scheme. But the emphatic and scornful manner in which the wearer of the necklace refused his overtures completely surprised him and put him out of countenance. At a moment when there was no need for concealment here was Madeleine vehemently dismissing him and all his works, and informing him in the most unmistakable terms that she cared for him not the snap of her finger. The tables were turned; and before he could recover from his bewilderment his interlocutor had slipped away from him and disappeared. It was while this discomfiture was still tingling in his ears that he encountered Jack, and heard from him the amazing story of his parentage.

It was not easy, even for a man like Bryan, to see his way clearly and at once through this zigzag of circumstances; and he had not yet made up his mind how to act, when he was confronted by the true Madeleine, in a mood of mingled passion and agitation that made her peculiarly difficult to deal with. She reproached him for his past apathy and reticence; but, in the same breath, she plainly insinuated that she would not have responded to his suggestion of a secret marriage in quite the manner that Kate Roland had done. How should he reply? The situation of half an hour ago was altered now. The stimulating barriers were broken down; not only that, but the worldly advantages of the step he had been on the point of taking were seriously in jeopardy, if not actually eliminated. Bryan did not really care for money and social position as a miser and a snob care for them, but he was alive to the taint of failure and absurdity which would attach to a man who should unite himself to a woman reputed to be an heiress, who turned out to be none. He was provoked with himself for having been bamboozled, and was by no means in an accommodating humour. 'What one says in a masquerade,' he remarked in effect to Madeleine, 'must not be taken too seriously.' The sentiment was capable of bearing more than one meaning, but Madeleine, who had impetuously laid herself open to insult, was too sensitive not to understand it as levelled against herself. She shrank back at once, and so the interview ended.

Bryan, as soon as his spleen had relieved itself, began to reconsider his position more coolly. Madeleine must not be let slip thus. What if, after all, the disaster impending over her fortunes could be averted? Might not Jack be persuaded to give up his enterprise? or, if he proved obstinate, might he not be prevented? And then, how would Bryan look, if Madeleine, smarting under the slight she had received, were to turn to some one else—to Stanhope, for example—for consolation? This apprehension wrought yet another

change in the man's purpose; Madeleine appeared once more desirable. Such are the vacillations which beset every resolve in which the heart is not primarily enlisted. He set himself to test the constancy of Jack's determination; and when he found himself foiled on that issue, his fiercer traits began to creep into visibility. Here, however, he might have paused, content to have contemplated the ugly plunge, without taking it, had he been left to himself. But there was a Caliban at hand, for whose existence Bryan was responsible, and who had already succeeded in establishing a strange sort of sway over him. Identifying himself wholly with his nominal master, Tom Berne constituted himself the latter's evil genius. But the relation between these two men is not to be described in a phrase. If anything in the phenomena of the communion of human beings deserves to be called hideous, it is surely such a thing as this. Tom Berne, up to the moment when Bryan Sinclair first crossed his path, had been a resolute, capable, honest fellow, whose great physical strength sometimes tempted him to be overbearing, but who was accounted a good and trustworthy chap in the main. Bryan met him, fought him, and beat him; and beat him in such a way as to break his spirit. Tom became, soul and body, his slave. At last, by Bryan's command, Tom killed a man who turned out to be his own brother. From that time, a change began to exist in their mutual attitude. Tom, whose character had become more and more debased after he had surrendered his moral responsibility, had nevertheless (let us suppose) solaced himself with the notion that the recording angel, in making up the indictment against him hereafter, would make allowance for the fact that the sins committed by him at Bryan's instigation were practically involuntary. But the killing of his brother, though as involuntary as any of the former acts, differed from them in being a final outrage upon whatever remained of Tom's human affections. It turned the man from a passive slave into an active devil. All thought or care about his future salvation vanished from his mind. His complete object in life was now Bryan's destruction. Not his physical destruction, however—or that only subordinately—but the eternal damnation of his soul. To compass this end he hit upon a device of singular ingenuity, and indicating the awakening in him of an intellectual cunning more subtle than any ordinary circumstances could have rendered him capable of. So subtle, indeed, and yet so simple was his procedure, that for a long time Bryan himself had no suspicion of the change, and never, perhaps, arrived at a full understanding of it. Superficially, all went on as before; Tom was still the unquestioning and complaisant slave, executing, without hesitation or reluctance, whatever unsavoury or unholy job Bryan deemed it beneath his own dignity to have a hand in. But by degrees the master felt, rather than perceived, that his tool was becoming in some way more assimilated to himself than heretofore. Tom seemed to have so completely laid aside his individuality, to have so utterly made Bryan's will his own, that there was no longer any other than

a physical or accidental distinction between them. Tom was a supplementary Bryan; he was the manifestation of all Bryan's wickeder and baser characteristics. One soul informed them both; but while in Bryan this soul still retained some elements that were at least intellectually good and noble, in Tom it was unmixed and sunless evil. Whatever life Tom had, he took from Bryan; but it was moral death and corruption, not life, that he gave in return. The physical parallel of the situation would be that of a festering limb, which draws its vital nourishment from the body, and insinuates in return its own poison into the whole system. And there is another step in the analogy. After the mortification of the limb has set in, it begins to develop a horrible life of its own—the life which announces annihilation. In the same way, Tom, his moral rottenness being established, began to manifest a loathsome and fatal kind of vitality. Slowly, but surely, he ceased merely to discharge the evil offices with which he was commissioned, and assumed the attitude of a suggestor and advocate of sin. In deadly hatred, as in immeasurable love, an obscure bond of sympathy seems to unite the hating or loving hearts; and it appeared as if Tom were immediately made aware of the presence of any the most minute germ of wicked intent in Bryan's mind, and straightway set himself to cherish and encourage it. Had he also planted it? Bryan sometimes suspected so; but there was never any direct evidence to that effect. Certain it was, however, that Bryan became daily more prone to evil impulses, and that Tom's alacrity in bringing these impulses to realisation was every day more marked and less liable to restraint. This would have mattered little had Bryan been able to free himself from the persuasion that he, quite as much as Tom, was guilty of whatever Tom did. When a man is moved to commit a murder, he has the option of resisting the temptation or of yielding to it; but for Bryan this option no longer existed; no sooner did the temptation enter into his own heart, than he saw the reflection of it in Tom's eyes, and felt assured that sooner or later he—through Tom's agency—would commit it. Thus had his deliberate maltreatment of another man's soul resulted in the loss of his own moral free-will. Between thinking and doing evil there was for him no more than a nominal distinction; and evil thoughts were fast gaining the ascendency over all others. It was no figure of speech, therefore, to say that he was now the slave and Tom the master.

What was to be done? The most obvious thing was to sever his connection with Tom at once. But we have already seen how this expedient was defeated. Tom, with a hideous parody of affection, declared his inability to exist apart from his adored master. Wages were no object—hard treatment was no deterrent; where Bryan was, Tom must be, until the end. Until the end? Then why not hasten the end? Why not take the wretch by the throat and strangle the life out of him on the spot? Alas! the deed were easy, but the relief would be delusive. Tom would be only too happy to have Bryan

murder him. But Bryan knew that in murdering him he would inflict the final defeat and humiliation upon himself; and much as he had lost, he was not yet so desperate as to do that. No other escape was practicable; so there was nothing to do but endure.

We need not enter into the details of the plot by which it was intended that Jack should be prevented from obstructing Madeleine's inheritance. Its accidental miscarriage afforded a perverse sort of triumph to Bryan, while it filled Tom with malignant disappointment. This faithful and devoted agent had risked the gravest personal consequences in order to do his beloved master so signal a service. He had considered all the bearings of the deed, and had decided that it was worth risking hanging for; merely to be knocked senseless in the attainment of such an object would be a positive privilege. But the stars in their courses fought against him, and he had his aching bones for his pains. The situation as regarded Bryan and Madeleine thus remained unaltered; and it was necessary to contrive some other device; for Bryan would not consent to give her up (even without her fortune) so long as anything beside his own good pleasure stood in the way of his possessing her. But the position of affairs demanded patience and caution. It was still possible, in the first place, that Jack's anticipations might come to nought. Until that point was settled one way or the other, especial care must be taken to do nothing that could in any way compromise Madeleine. To marry her out of hand (assuming her to be amenable to such a course) would be equally imprudent. But neither would it be safe to leave her without an explanation of his conduct during the interval which must elapse before the trial—if there was a trial—took place. What, then, should the explanation be, and how should it be offered? After his blunder with Kate, not to mention his rencontre with Madeleine herself, he could hardly expect to be received as usual at the house. It would be necessary to find some other place of meeting, and, what was more difficult, to induce Madeleine to meet him there. Having accomplished that, he must rely upon the charms of his eloquent tongue, the fertility of his resources, and the assumption that Madeleine's love for him was stronger than her mistrust or her pride, to help him out of his difficulty.

One evening, when, having meditated deeply upon these things, he was about entering his brougham to seek distraction at the opera, he heard his name spoken, and looking round, saw Stanhope Maurice coming hastily towards him along the pavement. He took his foot from the step, and waited, with the handle of the door in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Suggestive of the unwisdom of self-sacrifice; the person for whom the sacrifice is made not being, as a general thing, apt to be improved thereby either morally or materially.

BRYAN had not forgotten how Stanhope had 'cut' him at their last casual meeting; but, occupied with more important matters, the incident had not much impressed him. He had always been accustomed to treat the baronet with a certain blunt good humour, but had never felt much respect for his brains; like Iago, he had 'made his fool his purse' upon occasion; but now that the occasion was no longer present, he did not particularly care whether Stanhope quarrelled with him or not. He hoped no good and feared no harm from him. As the latter came up, he said—

'Well, what's the matter now?'

'I am the bearer of an important and delicate message,' said Stanhope, with a sort of agitated formality. 'I need scarcely assure you, Mr. Sinclair, it is not for my own pleasure, after having declined intercourse with you, that I now——'

'Pshaw, man! leave your damnable faces and begin!' exclaimed Bryan with a short laugh. 'It would take a sharper cut than yours to draw my blood. Speak up!'

'This is about—about Miss Vivian,' said the baronet, dropping his voice.

'What? the old lady?'

'You know to whom I refer. You never told me you had intentions——'

'Now you mention it, I don't believe I ever did. Well?'

'But you did think——'

'Bless you, man! if I told you all I think, where would you find room in your head to put the information?'

'I cannot say what I wish to here,' remarked Stanhope, growing red.

'Hop into my brougham, then, and let's have it as we go along.' They entered the vehicle accordingly, and it set off. 'Now then!' said Bryan.

'I was at the masquerade the other night,' Stanhope began. 'I know—she has told me—what took place there. You mistook some one for her, and——'

'Oh! sits the wind in that quarter? Are you her ambassador?' Stanhope did not immediately answer. 'Or her accepted lover—is that it?' continued Bryan, looking at him.

'My arrangements are made to go abroad next month,' replied Stanhope with solemn reserve.

'Ah! Hum! I see! Poor boy! So we're both in the same box, eh?'

'I did not come to talk about myself,' Stanhope said.

Bryan rapidly reflected. It was evident that Stanhope had something to communicate, and it would be no use continuing to snub him until he had found out what it was. Possibly the communication might be pertinent to Bryan's present embarrassment. Such a messenger should be conciliated and encouraged. Bryan therefore discharged his tone of its brusque and mocking accent, and said, quietly—

'Listen to me, Stanhope—we've known each other all our lives. A woman has come between us; that's the curse of all friendships. I deceived you—I own it. But a man of the world like you can make allowances. A man may be driven to do a thing he regrets, to avoid doing a thing he would regret still more. In love and war, you know—eh!'

'I know I would rather be caught in some villainy myself, than catch you in it!' exclaimed Stanhope, impulsively. 'I have always quoted you as the finest fellow I knew. You know what confidence I always put in you. I never doubted you because my affairs went wrong. I'd lose all the money over again to be certain you are an honest man. But I did think, after all you let me say to you about my feeling for Madeleine——'

'Yes—yes—you have some claim to know my motives, and perhaps you may sometime——. But first—what is all this about?'

'I want you to understand, in the first place, that I love her with all my heart and soul. It's a sacred thing, and, whatever you may think of me, it deserves respect. If you don't care for her as much as I do, Sinclair—if you have any thought of playing her false—in God's name say so now! Only a devil incarnate would see a girl like her shamed because she—she—had given away her heart. By Jove!'

Bryan perceived from his companion's manner that he must have offered himself to Madeleine and been refused. This put him at his ease. He spread out his hands with an ingenuous gesture. 'Do I look like a devil incarnate?' he inquired.

'Well, you best know what you are. I have known her ever since she was a child—a little black-eyed creature, with all sorts of queer little fantastic ways. I fancied I could have her at any time; I never thought any other man would come between us. But I'd given up the hope of making her my wife yet—until I'd done something to improve my prospects. And all the time she was—— Good God! Bryan, how could you have the heart to let me expose myself before you so? You two may have been making fun of me. No! I can't think that; she is too noble to do such a thing! But it wasn't fair of you. If you had told me, in the beginning, that it was you she cared for, there's no man I would so gladly have seen her happy with. By Jove, you might have told me!'

'By Jove, so I might!' returned Bryan, thrusting his hands in his pockets. 'But the fact is, I was down on my luck. The only

safe thing seemed to be, to keep dark. As for your talking to me about her, how could I prevent that? However, since I got back from America, I'm bound to confess I have fared no better than you. We're not on terms, it appears.'

'But she says she spoke to you after you had spoken to Mrs. Roland at the masquerade.'

'But not before Mrs. Roland knew what I had meant to tell Madeleine.'

'What difference did that make?'

'All the difference in the world. I had my plans laid, wise or foolish is no matter now. Since Mrs. Roland had found them out, there was an end of them. There could be no secret marriage after that—eh?'

'But you gave Madeleine to understand that you had not been in earnest from the first.'

This was, in truth, the nucleus of the difficulty. Unless Bryan could excogitate some plausible explanation for his sudden change of front towards Madeleine, he could hardly expect her to forgive him. He considered for a moment. Then he looked up.

'Does Madeleine actually suppose that between the time of my leaving Kate Roland and meeting her, I had changed my mind about her?'

'She could suppose nothing else, if she trusted her ears. But she is all truth and purity herself, and she wishes to believe, if she can, that you are as honest as she. Rather than risk a misunderstanding she sacrifices her pride, and gives you this chance to set yourself right. And if you take unfair advantage of her position, by Heaven, you deserve to be shot!'

'Isn't it rather odd that a girl should ask her rejected suitor to be the medium of reconciliation between her and the rival?' Bryan inquired demurely.

Stanhope answered nobly, 'She knew I cared more for her than for myself, so she honoured me with her confidence. And if I'm worthy her trust, I'm worthy yours, if you were the best man that ever lived on the earth!'

'You do love her, Stanhope, and no mistake! and I believe you'd make her a better husband than I,' said Bryan, leaning back in his seat. 'However, Fate will have its way! As to this question, it was not I that changed, but the circumstances.'

'How do you mean that?'

'It's simple enough. But here we are at the theatre; come in—there's room for two in my box.'

They alighted, and Stanhope followed Bryan into the house. The opera was 'Don Juan;' the curtain had not yet risen. Bryan removed his hat and overcoat, and appeared in evening dress. Stanhope, not being thus arrayed, remained in the background.

'The thing lies in a nutshell,' Bryan continued. 'I go to the masquerade with a certain end in view. An accident upsets my cal-

culations. Having betrayed my secret to Kate Roland, could I repeat to Madeleine what I had just said to her? Would you have done so in my place? My only wish was to spare her annoyance—to save her from being compromised. The best way seemed to be to treat the whole affair as a jest—to pretend that I had known it was Kate all along, and had proposed the secret marriage only as a bit of fun. I could see that she felt hurt for the moment; but better that than have outsiders suppose I had intended any surreptitious action. I hoped to have an opportunity for private explanation afterwards, but she has allowed me none. I have not had an easy hour since. You know as well as I do that the girl can't take care of herself—one must do it for her. Her happiness and welfare are all that I think of.'

'Well,' said Stanhope with a sigh, 'I must admit that you have met the objections fairly. I will let her know what has passed between us.'

The orchestra had entered upon the last movement of the overture. Bryan happened to glance across the house while Stanhope was speaking, and saw two ladies enter a box opposite; he recognised them immediately. The tallest of them seated herself in the front of the box, and leaned upon its cushioned edge; her eyes wandered over the audience, and finally lighted upon Bryan, who immediately rose. She drew back.

Bryan turned to Stanhope. 'Give me your hand, old friend!' he said, and held out his own. The baronet complied, with some surprise, for the other's tone was unexpectedly cordial. They stood thus in the front, in full view of the house.

'I shall take some better opportunity for speaking to you further on this matter,' Bryan said. 'You have acted like the fine fellow I always knew you to be. I see you want to be off now; but don't let it be long before I hear from you!'

Poor Stanhope departed without suspecting who had been the witness of this friendly passage; otherwise he might have been more heedful of his bearing; for though Bryan's words had all been reasonable, they had not put Stanhope entirely at his ease. Though they had hardly aroused his mistrust, they had not altogether satisfied his expectation. However, he hoped for the best.

When he had gone, Bryan again looked across the house. The overture was just concluding. The lady opposite was fanning herself fitfully. Their eyes met. Bryan left his box; and three minutes afterwards he was by Madeleine's side, and had felt the pressure of her hand. The other lady was Miss Vivian. The curtain went up, and the opera began.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In which Mr. Caliper recompenses himself for some of the trials incident to his career: and Aunt Maria's intelligence is obscured by too much enlightenment.

'WHERE the deuce can that fellow Caliper be?' exclaimed Major Clanroy, impatiently. 'I sent him word for three sharp, and here it is a quarter past. Can't do anything without him, you know. Deuce take the fellow.'

'I didn't at all like Caliper's manner when I saw him last,' Mrs. Clanroy observed, shaking out the folds of her ample black skirt with her fat white hand. 'He has been making money of late, and it has made him conceited.'

'Nonsense, Gertrude!' her husband retorted testily. 'Caliper will always have manners enough to know his own interests, won't he?'

'You will never persuade me,' remarked Miss Vivian, tapping with her long finger nails on the table, 'that Caliper is a man to be depended on. And this proves it.'

'Poor Maria! she has no confidence in any one,' Gertrude murmured gently; and the eyes of the two sisters met for a moment with an expression that was, perhaps, sisterly, but was certainly not affectionate.

For these three high-born personages had not altered essentially during the seven years or so that had passed over them since we last saw them together. Here they sat, in the same large, unfriendly room, with its expensive and unbeautiful furniture; and Maria was bonier, Gertrude stouter, the major redder, and all three of them greyer and more infirm than before; but their attitude toward one another and the world was very little changed. The major's gout had developed to an inconvenient degree, to the diminishing of his patience, and the increase of his expletives; Miss Vivian was certainly not less positive or cross-grained than before; and the expansion of Gertrude's contours seemed to have afforded room for the growth of her slyness and demure maliciousness. Here, at all events, they sat, for better or worse; and the object for which they had met happened to be nearly allied to that which had called them together on the previous occasion. The question of Madeleine's inheritance had again come to the surface, and under unexpected and stirring conditions.

A short silence followed the sentences above quoted. Then the major said—

'Shouldn't wonder if Caliper had found out the whole thing was a humbug.'

'The claimant, at any rate, must be an impostor,' rejoined Gertrude.

'You believed in him when this ridiculous affair first came up,' said her sister.

'Luckily Madeleine's birthday is next month,' observed Gertrude, folding her hands over her abundant waist, and gazing at Maria's cap-strings with amiable superciliousness; 'and that safely over, there will be an end to all claims, legitimate or otherwise.'

'End of a fiddle-stick,' growled the major. 'The man has declared himself, and the thing will have to be settled one way or the other before Madey can touch a penny—if it takes ten years. And he's likely enough to be in the right too; may be the best thing the girl could do would be to split the difference, and marry him.'

'Marry a vulgar adventurer—a creature who goes about in a blanket and leggings, and is no better than an Indian! How can you talk so, Arthur dear? I trust the poor child won't think of marrying any one at present.'

'You'd like her to die an old maid, perhaps, and bequeath her property to you,' Aunt Maria suggested. 'You will never persuade me that that hasn't been your aim all along. You thought if a claim was made, and the matter left in doubt, you would get the benefit of the executorship. But now——'

'What the devil do you mean, Maria?' broke in the major. 'Benefit by the executorship, indeed? Do you mean to say——'

'Don't be hard upon her, Arthur,' sweetly interposed his wife. 'We must never take Maria seriously; she is hardly responsible. And I am sure she cannot suppose I wish dear Madeleine to be an old maid. Madeleine has examples to warn her against that. And an old maid would generally have been something else if she could have had her wish; but Madeleine is a girl whom any man might care for. It is such a misfortune to be crabbed and homely.'

'It's lucky for both of you that you don't live together,' observed the major; 'you'd scratch each other to death in a week.'

Hereupon ensued another pause.

'If Madeleine follows my advice,' Maria finally said, 'she will marry Bryan Sinclair. I have seen a good deal of him lately, and he seems to me a very clever and able man. She will need a strong hand to take care of her when I am gone.'

'Sinclair can take care of himself well enough, I've no doubt,' said the major, with a laugh; 'but the less he has to do with any young girl that's got money the better for her, I take it. However, if this affair goes against her, and he makes her an offer, then we'll consider it. Confound that fellow Caliper, he ought to be shot!'

'If Mr. Caliper had known his business, he would have given us information of this conspiracy long ago,' observed Miss Vivian. 'It's no thanks to him that we discovered it before it was quite too late. You may blame Bryan Sinclair, major, but it was he that first told me about it.'

'How came he to know of it?'

'He is the sort of person, I fancy, to know a good deal of other people's business,' said Gertrude. 'But it has been poor Maria's fate to make mistakes about men from her youth up.'

'I never made but one mistake about you,' retorted the old lady, turning white with suppressed ire. 'You were a liar then, and you have been one ever since.'

'Hoity toity! that's plain language!' exclaimed the major, elevating his eyebrows.

'Would you mind telling me what mistake you refer to?' Gertrude inquired, her ordinary mellifluous tones betraying, in spite of herself, a tremor of malignity.

'You know very well what I mean,' Maria replied.

'Shall I make a guess?' asked the other tauntingly.

The two sisters glared at each other for a moment. Then Maria said, in a harsh, breathless voice—

'I sha'n't prevent you.'

'You wish Major Clanroy to hear?'

Gertrude paused. In fact, she by no means desired to give up her proprietorship of Maria's miserable secret. It had been a most useful possession to her, enabling her to exercise over her sister a power altogether out of proportion with her own intrinsic strength. If Maria were now to repudiate this black-mail, Gertrude would not only lose her advantage, but she would herself be, to an inconvenient extent, at Maria's mercy. For the latter had become acquainted with many facts of Gertrude's conduct and circumstances which it would be most inexpedient for the major to know, but which Maria would be extremely apt to tell him, once this check upon her sinister communicativeness was removed. Reflecting upon this, and perceiving that Maria had been brought to a dangerous pitch of exasperation, Gertrude paused, and began to cast about in her mind how she might most adroitly escape from the discomfiture which menaced her.

'You may say what you like,' resumed Maria, bitterly and excitedly. 'I will not be threatened and bullied by you any longer. I would rather be what I have been than what you are. There can be no worse shame for me than to have submitted to a woman like you. Come, Arthur Clanroy, your wife has something to tell you that will amuse you. It will make you love her even more than you do now, if that's possible. And when she has had her say, I will have mine!'

'What the mischief is the matter now?' cried the major, putting down his newspaper and drawing his eyebrows together. ''Pon my soul, you two women——'

'I'm sure I have no idea what Maria means,' Gertrude protested, manifestly disconcerted. 'I have nothing to tell—nothing at all. Maria calls me very hard names, and seems to think I wish to do her some injury; but I can assure her she is mistaken. I wish nothing more than to live in peace and kindness with everybody——'

'That won't do, Gertrude!' interrupted her sister, sitting erect in her chair, her haggard face working with angry contempt. 'You want to keep your hold over me, by keeping silence until my blood is cool again; but it won't do. If you don't tell Arthur, I will! He

shall know the truth, once for all, and make what use he chooses of it. And when he knows your treachery to me, perhaps he'll be prepared to believe that you may have been treacherous to him as well. Listen to me, Arthur,' she continued, breathing hard, and pressing her lips together between her sentences; 'I will tell you the secret that this woman has been threatening to betray ever since you married her. There was a time when I would sooner have died than have you suspect it; but I don't care now! You may think that I have lost all my pride—perhaps I have; but I am too proud still to live any longer in fear of that woman. You know very well, Arthur Clanroy, that when you first knew me and her, it was not her that you intended to marry!'

At this point, the major, who had been eyeing Maria and his wife alternately, with a peculiar quizzical expression, was delivered of a laugh which caused Maria to stop short, and her elderly blood to flush her sallow cheeks. Gertrude, meanwhile, was privately making appealing signs to her husband, which, however, he disregarded.

'Bless my soul, Maria!' he exclaimed, partly recovering his gravity at length, 'is that what you're driving at? You might have spared yourself a great deal of trouble. No, no, Gertrude, you needn't make faces—I might have known the sort of mischief you would make. My good creature,' he continued, again addressing himself to his sister-in-law, 'there's no need for all this mystery and agitation. It's no secret to me that you did me the honour to have a preference for me once upon a time. Good God! I've known it for years and years!'

'You knew it? How?' stuttered Maria.

'And I supposed you knew I knew it—when I thought about it at all, which I haven't done since I can remember. It was Gertrude told me—not long after I married her, I fancy. And so she's been holding that over your head all this time, has she? Well, all I've got to say is, it's just what I should have expected of her; and if you choose to take a cat-o'-nine-tails to her for it, I sha'n't interfere; it would serve her right! And egad, Maria, if I was where I was five-and-twenty years ago, I'd choose you instead of her—that is, if I didn't make up my mind to die a bachelor!'

The effect of this announcement upon Maria was much more profound than she herself could realise just at that moment. It sounded in her amazed ears like a fanciful story, told of somebody else. To believe it would be, in a manner, to disbelieve the better part of her past life. The thought that she had allowed Gertrude to tyrannise over her by dint of a wholly imaginary terror, was even more intolerable than the reflection that the major had always been familiar with the fact that she had of all others sought to hide from him; or than the spectacle of his jocose indifference, half contemptuous and half compassionate. The comfort and substance of her existence had been stolen from her by a vulgar deception—a trick that she

might have seen through from the first. The predicament was too tragic for anger; and most tragical because most absurd. For the present, Maria could only feel crushed—all her vital energy gone from her. She had not strength even to get up and leave the room; scarcely to draw her breath. Her jaw fell, and her eyes were fixed in a dull stare at vacancy. Could such a thing be? What would happen next? This secret of hers had been to her the essential reality of the world. But now that reality was proved a delusion, what would become of all the lesser realities? Would the solid earth vanish like a bubble?

What did happen next, not inopportunely perhaps, was the entrance of Mr. Caliper. The lawyer briefly and somewhat unconcernedly apologised for his delay, having, as he observed, only just taken leave of a client. The low and broad summit of Mr. Caliper's head was now of a brilliant baldness, and what hair remained to him was of a grey hue; in other respects he appeared much the same as seven years before. He put his hat on the table, and sat down without waiting for an invitation to do so. Upon the whole, a more independent Mr. Caliper than the former one. But of the three persons in the room, only the major was, for the time being, in a state of mind composed enough to take notice of Mr. Caliper's behaviour.

'And now, what can I do for you?' the lawyer inquired, resting his hands upon the knees, with the tips of his fingers meeting, and serenely raising his eyebrows.

'To begin with, let's hear what you have to say about this confounded young impostor from America!' returned Major Clanroy, curling his white moustache, and speaking with abruptness.

Mr. Caliper leaned forward with eyebrows pointed interrogatively.

'The terms of your description scarcely enable me to identify——' he said, with a polished inflection and a smiling pause.

'Hang it! where are your wits, man?' broke out the irascible major. 'Have you never heard of the fellow who calls himself John Vivian, and I don't know what else?'

'Ah! you refer to the heir—to the claimant, I should perhaps say, the matter being still *sub judice*—to the estates and title of Lord Castlemere. Yes, I have heard of that gentleman—certainly, yes. His claim is likely to come to trial very shortly; if, that is to say, the parties at present in possession should decide to contest.'

'"If" indeed!' the major called out. 'Am I likely to sit still and see my ward robbed of forty thousand a year? What's got into you, Caliper?'

'I express no opinion either way,' replied the legal gentleman, unmoved. 'But I must say that I casually met Lord——the claimant some months ago, and learnt some of the particulars of his case, and the grounds upon which he founds it appeared to me weighty—very weighty, Major Clanroy. But of course you would be perfectly justified in opposing, even if failure were a foregone conclusion. Possibly, however—I merely hazard the conjecture—

possibly something in the nature of a compromise might prudently be entertained. The rival claimants are, if I may say so, of opposite sexes.'

'Well, but hang it! Caliper,' said the major, changing his tone, 'you don't think it's really so serious—eh? Do you hear this, Maria? Caliper says he thinks this fellow may establish his claim after all! Gad! so you saw him, did you? Has he got his papers with him?'

'I have reason to believe he is provided for all contingencies.'

'Since you have made his acquaintance it might be very useful if you were to find out all you can about his case, not letting him know that you were acting in our interest,' said Mrs. Clanroy timidly, after a glance at her sister. 'He might make some statements, you know, which could be used against him afterwards.'

'Caliper shall do nothing of the kind, if I know it!' put in the lady's husband grimly. 'The best help you can give us, Gertrude, is to hold your tongue. Let's have your opinion, Maria.'

Miss Vivian looked up, passed her tremulous fingers vaguely across her forehead, and said nothing. Her mind was still elsewhere.

'The claimant is a fine-looking young man, and of excellent address,' observed Mr. Caliper, speaking meditatively, with his eyes directed towards the cornice. 'In fact, as handsome and charming a gentleman as I have ever encountered. Were Miss Madeleine Vivian to see him—were a meeting to be arranged between them—I venture to imagine it might be attended with the best results. Otherwise I may state frankly that I should apprehend grave detriment to the young lady's interests.'

'It strikes me, Caliper, that for a solicitor your tone is rather queer. You don't mean to say, I suppose, that you would refuse to make a fight of it?'

'On the contrary, I shall enter upon the conduct of the case with the greatest confidence of success. When the facts are known there will scarcely be two opinions as to the result.'

'Then confound me if I can understand you, Caliper! You as good as said a moment ago that we hadn't the ghost of a chance, and now you contradict yourself flat!'

'Pardon me—I fail to detect my contradiction.'

'What the deuce do you mean, then? Come, sir, don't play off any of your legal quibbles on me! I'm not in a humour for it!'

'I can only repeat, Major Clanroy, that I fail to detect any inconsistency in my statements. I am, as I always have been, devoted to the Castlemere interests; I have said that I am confident of their success, and I shall, to the best of my poor ability, if occasion unhappily arises, support those interests before the proper tribunal. Can I be more explicit?'

'But if you are so certain that we shall win, what's the meaning of all your talk about compromise?'

'Ah! that was only in the interest of Miss Madeleine Vivian.'

'Well then—her interests are yours, aren't they?'

'Sentimentally, I admit; but in the legal sense, no.'

'Look here, Caliper, either you or I are daft! You are retained in the Castlemere interests—that is understood so far?'

'Precisely.'

'And Madeleine is the representative of Castlemere—the heiress of the estates. And yet you say that you are not acting in her legal interests. Explain that!'

'Ah, now I think I see your mistake,' said Mr. Caliper, nodding his head with a bland smile; 'or, to put it in another way, the point of our misunderstanding. I am engaged in the Castlemere interest; you assume Miss Madeleine to be the representative of that interest; while I, on the contrary, am compelled to recognise as the only true representative——' Here the lawyer paused, rose from his chair, and took up his hat.

'Who—in the devil's name?' cried the major.

'My client, John Vivian, fourteenth Baron Castlemere,' replied Mr. Caliper, bringing out his dramatic climax in the neatest and quietest manner imaginable.

The major's face became dark red, but after a few moments, by a severe effort, he managed to control himself. The lawyer had made a fool of him, but he determined to give him as little opportunity as possible to increase his triumph.

'I think, Caliper,' he said, with a rather ghastly smile, 'that we needn't detain you any longer this morning. Present my acknowledgments to his lordship for the suggestions he has conveyed to us through you; I'll think them over. Were you ever kicked down stairs?'

The manner in which the major made this inquiry had something in it which tended to promote the promptness of Mr. Caliper's withdrawal; nevertheless, on reaching the door, he found time to make a polite bow in the direction of Mrs. Clanroy. After the door had closed behind him the major thrust his hands in his pockets, took his stand upon the hearthrug, and whistled some bars of 'Bonnie Dundee.' Despite this apparent cheerfulness, however, the aspect of his brow was such as to admonish his wife of the inexpediency of accosting him. But at length she could endure no longer, and burst forth—

'Aren't you going to do anything to that wretch?' she exclaimed, with a sort of shrill passionateness. 'Are you going to let him insult and cheat us like that? Is he to——'

'Gertrude, I told you to hold your tongue once, and I tell you now, once more,' interrupted the major, stern as a judge at a court-martial; 'that's enough.' He then turned to Miss Vivian. 'You have brains, Maria,' he said; 'can't you advise me?'

The interrogative tone seemed partly to arouse the lady, and she looked up with an air of attempting to gather her faculties together.

'What is the matter?' she asked.

'About Caliper, you know,' said the major.

Miss Vivian gazed about vaguely for a moment, smiled in a mechanical manner, and shook her head.

'I suppose he will be here soon,' was all she said.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The main objection to any human substitute for Providence is, that it is apt to be one thing for one man, and another for another.

ONE grey day, in the autumn of the year, Madeleine Vivian issued from the door of the city mansion, with the interior of which the reader has already made acquaintance, and set her face in a southerly direction. She was dressed in a close-fitting garment of sombre hue, matching the complexion of the weather; only that, beneath her chin, appeared a glimpse of a crimson bow, the rest of which was concealed beneath her dress. She walked along at an even pace, as one who has a definite object in view, and paid no more attention to her environment than was sufficient to enable her to choose her course and to avoid collision with other people. Passing into Regent Street, she traversed the length of that thoroughfare, without pausing to look into the shop windows; and arriving at Piccadilly, she crossed over into the Haymarket. In front of the Haymarket Theatre placards were set forth, announcing the performance for that evening; and at these Madeleine glanced as she went by. Proceeding onwards, she entered Parliament Street, and presently came to an open space within view of the river. A grey Gothic edifice, fronted with two lofty towers, upreared itself before her; she entered it by a small door at the side, and found herself in the cool and shadowy hush of the lofty and serene interior.

Perhaps out of sympathy with the silent upward rush of the mighty arches, and the grey repose of the marble monuments, Madeleine's bearing lost its preoccupation and hurry, and she moved slowly and saunteringly along the vistaed aisle, lifting her eyes forward and aloft, and observing with conscious pleasure the illuminated splendour of the painted windows. Amidst the sublime encompassment of these aged walls, her spirit felt relieved and secure—more so than beneath the open infinitude of heaven. So long as she might remain here, no harm could come to her. There was comfort in the faint echo of her footsteps, reminding her that she was protected by the venerable sanctity of the last great religion of the world. The records of the dead were all around here, and in their company was peace. The breadth of accomplished centuries lay between her and the noisy conflict of the uncertain present; time had pursued her to the Abbey's threshold, but had not overpassed it. She breathed in freedom, and the tension of her thoughts relaxed. Compared with the antiquity of these steadfast pillars, her life was but as an hour in a great day; soon it would be past, and soon forgotten. Let her fancy it already over, and herself a ghost, musing serenely over the fever of dead anxieties. For the comedy of existence is profounder than its tragedy.

There were more than a few persons in the Abbey, although,

owing to its extent, it had the appearance of being practically empty. But by-and-by, as Madeleine paced meditatively onward, she perceived that she had entered a region which was secluded even amidst the omnipresent seclusion; its sole occupant being a quaint marble figure seated upon a pedestal against the wall. She stood with her eyes fixed upon this worthy, captivated by the vacant solemnity of his expression, but careless to search out his name; and had remained thus gazing for a minute or so, before becoming aware that she was not so much alone as she had imagined. From a nook behind the base of one of the columns uprose a tall young man whom Madeleine immediately knew that she had seen before, though, in the startled survey of the first moment, she could not remember where. His features were handsome and winning, but there was a remarkable penetration in his regard, not deliberate, but his glance met hers in such a way that she had a feeling of being looked into more deeply than she wished; and this made her mentally shrink before him. He wore a kind of cloak-like garment on his shoulders, and held in his hand a broad-brimmed felt hat. His forehead was white, but the lower part of his face was tanned by the sun. After the first look, he smiled slightly and said—

'I was wondering when I should see you again.'

'I remember you now,' she returned. 'You are the Troubadour.'

The other was silent for a little, eyeing her attentively, but not in a manner that could offend her. 'It's pleasant to see your face,' he said at length. 'This is a fit place for you to be in. I almost knew you would be here.'

'I have been here only two or three times in my life,' replied Madeleine. 'My coming is an accident—at least——. Have you been in London ever since?'

'I was away for a long time. I have had changes.'

'And I, too.'

'Were they happy ones?'

'No. I don't know, though. Perhaps they are happy. Are yours?' she added, with a smile; 'or would you prefer to be a Troubadour still?'

'I have more power than I used to have. But the world seems to have little in it, that what one person gains, some other loses. I should like every one to have as much as I have.'

'It does not follow that you should give up what is yours to others.'

'No; I have a better right to it than they. Only I don't see how anything can really be mine, except what is in myself. All other things have belonged to other people before I was born, and will go to others after I am dead. Most of the trouble in the world seems to come from quarrels about such things, which belong to nobody. Iago says, you know, that he who steals his good name is the only real thief. It's a puzzle. What ought I to do?'

'Why do you ask me that?' demanded Madeleine, with an

impulse of surprise that was not unpleasurable. Indeed, scarcely was it surprise at all. Her meetings with this young man had been in each instance so unconventional and romantic, that she had begun insensibly to feel as if they stood in an exceptional relation as regarded each other. They could talk together in terms and on subjects not otherwise available. In her imagination he figured as a sort of abstract or ideal being; eminently handsome; strange and gentle of address; mysterious in origin and circumstances, with a mystery which she instinctively wished should remain unsolved; and able, perhaps, to afford her a sympathy and comprehension which were the more worth having because they were given on, so to say, immaterial and impersonal grounds. They met as spirits might meet, regarding things in their essence, and, apart from accidental or particular conditions. Such a relation, to a worldly adviser, would appear full of danger and impropriety; and it was partly owing to her recognition of this that Madeleine had hitherto refrained from speaking of her unconventional acquaintance, to anyone, even to Bryan. She was inwardly conscious of a purity and value in this relation which would be profaned by communicating its existence to any third person whatever.

When, therefore, her companion appealed to her for counsel, she felt a thrill of surprised pleasure. It was a sign that he regarded her in the same light that she did him—that her reading of the situation had not been at fault. And though she replied with 'Why do you ask me that?' she foreboded the nature of his answer even while she spoke the words.

He began, however, in a manner which seemed somewhat foreign to the point.

'I never was taught any religion,' he said. 'To be out of doors was the only religion I knew; beautiful days, and storms, and darkness, used to give me the feeling that means God. But when I saw that picture of your face in the gold locket, it seemed all I wanted to make me a man. I thought of it all my life afterwards, and whenever I did anything false or unkind, it made me ashamed. At last, when I met you, you were even more than I had looked for. If you are not my religion, I don't know what else can be. I wish to do nothing that you would think badly of, and I don't care who else thinks badly of it. When I am in doubt or trouble, you will come, like an angel, and show me what to do; or the thought of you will tell me, if you are not there.'

This speech—which has been written down rather as it remained in Madeleine's memory than literally as it was uttered—had nothing of personal passion in it. The tone was even less that of a lover than the phraseology. It was the tone of grave and spontaneous homage, in which no bodily, but only a spiritual, emotion had place. Yet to Madeleine it did not seem profane. A lovely woman does not put such fixed limits to the influence of her loveliness as not to admit the possibility of their indefinite enlargement. Why might she not be

to some man as his religion? She might thereby help him, without detriment, surely, to her own soul. The world is full of symbols; why might she not be to this man the symbol of whatsoever he considered good? She must always be, indeed, far less good than he esteemed her; but in so far as she could lead him in lofty paths, she would tend to become what he believed her to be. To her mind, at the present juncture, one main charm of the idea lay in its freedom from the conditions of ordinary affection as between man and woman. Her human love lay elsewhere, and was absorbing enough—ambiguous enough, too, in its possible issues and contingencies; but this was something on another level, and of different significance. It was purely ideal and symbolical, and therefore void of peril and offence. Of all the *rôles* she had ever imagined for herself, this seemed the worthiest and most exhilarating.

'If I advise you,' she said, 'you must take what I say only as something that you might have read perhaps, and that could be meant for you only in so far as it was true. And of course you must be the judge whether it is true or not. As to what you asked me, I think you ought to keep what is yours, if it came to you not less honestly than worldly possessions in general come to people. It may not be yours in the sense that your thoughts and feelings are; but it is more yours than mine, for instance; and it is your duty to take care of it, and to use it—not selfishly or hurtfully—but in the way that seems to you best and wisest. If you have money and power, you should make them felt for some good purpose; you should not throw them away for others, who might be less honest than you, to pick up.'

'But if I knew some other person, who deserved it as much as I, ought I not to give it up?' inquired he, raising his eyes, which had been fixed on the ground, to her face.

'No; there is something sacred in luck,' Madeleine replied with a sigh. 'It comes and goes without our help, and we know not for what purpose, like the gods of old time. You must not interfere with its whims, though sometimes it curses when it seems to bless, and sometimes its blessings are a curse. I suppose we shall understand it afterwards. It is your luck to be rich, and mine to be poor, and perhaps we may both be the happier for it. But if we are not, still it is luck, and unhappiness may be best for us. How can we know?'

'But may not luck be an evil god, instead of a good one, and mean to destroy us, even when seeming kind?'

As he spoke, a silver, bell-like sound began to make rhythmical music somewhere in the depths of vaulted space above their heads. It was the clock, striking the hour of noon. To Madeleine it brought the recollection of an engagement which it was strange she should have forgotten even for a moment.

'I must go!' she said abruptly, and making a motion to depart. Then she paused and turned to him once more. 'It is more likely that you should see me again than that I should see you,' she added. 'I wish you well.' She gave him her hand, which he grasped and

immediately relinquished. 'Perhaps,' she concluded, 'I may some day need your help more than you can ever need mine.'

'If my help is all you need, you need never fear,' he answered. Without more words they parted, he remaining where he was, and she passing out of his sight amidst the clustered pillars of the aisle. He had listened to his sermon, and if there were somewhat less of divine wisdom in it than he was apt to imagine, it had at all events been delivered with as much goodwill as is generally the accompaniment of orthodox pulpit discourses.

Madeleine, meanwhile, had betaken herself to the end of the south transept, where was a small doorway protected by a screen. Pushing aside the latter, she entered, and stood within a pleasant and shadowy inclosed space, whose walls were peopled with the busts of some of the most famous men of modern times, and of several who were perhaps not so famous. Nevertheless, a more august company has not often been gathered together within such socially narrow limits. Two or three persons were lingering about the place, staring up at the marble countenances, which stared back with the unseeing gaze which characterises statues even more than people of fashion and idiots. As Madeleine paused near the entrance, looking for some one who did not appear, she felt a touch upon her arm, and, turning round, beheld Bryan Sinclair, in very accurate morning costume, with a silk hat in one hand and an ebony cane in the other. His aspect in other respects was alert but genial.

'Come and sit down on this bench,' he said. 'Here we have rare Ben Jonson to watch over us. You are a good child to be so punctual. Did you have any difficulty about getting away?'

'No. Well—tell me!'

'Just what we expected. The decision is in his favour.'

Madeleine kept very quiet, folding her hands in her lap, and looking straight before her.

'Then I am not the heiress of Castlemere?' she finally said.

'No; but you're the heiress of a great genius, which is better. For my own part, now that it's all over, I would not have had otherwise. If you had remained an heiress, you never would have been an actress—except in private life, which is dangerous and unprofitable. Now, you will have the whole world at your feet; whereas in the other case you would have had only a section of English society. And as for the money part of it, you can make as much as you can conveniently get rid of, and save something to found a hospital with afterwards. What more do you want?'

'I want a great deal more,' returned Madeleine in a low voice.

'Why, you insatiable little monster! How so?'

'I want to be sure that you love me and will be true to me. No, I don't half trust you, Bryan; you have got my heart, but not my head. If my heart were dead, I believe my head would hate you.'

'Your heart will outlive the rest of you, my dear.'

'I hope it will!' said Madeleine, with thoughtful emphasis.

Anon, with a sigh, she roused herself and added, 'You must tell me the particulars.'

'Purely legal technicalities. The judge complimented your side on not raising any factitious obstacles. He said if the matter had come to a regular trial, with appeals and so forth, it might have lasted till the end of the century, but could have had only one ending, when it did end. He gave that thief Caliper a slap in the face, for ratting; but I must do Caliper the justice to say that he looked as if he enjoyed it. The whole business was over in an hour or so. I don't suppose forty thousand a year ever changed hands so quietly since the world began. And to think that an ounce of lead, in the right place, might have outweighed the whole of it!'

'Was the person—was the present Lord Castlemere there?' inquired Madeleine, after another meditative pause.

'He turned up, for a few minutes.'

'What kind of a man is he?'

Bryan hesitated, glancing at her from the corner of his blue eye. At length he said, 'From what I saw of him, I should say he was a commonplace little chap, under my height, with a crook in his back, and a long sallow face, with spectacles. He was dressed like a monkey on a hand-organ, and altogether looked not unlike one.' Here Bryan chuckled, as if at the graphic truth of the portrait he had drawn. 'I don't fancy you would care to adopt Uncle Arthur's suggestion as regarded that fellow,' he finished by remarking.

Madeleine shuddered slightly. 'I could as soon think of marrying any other man, while you are alive, as I could if I were already your wife. And yet I know you will live to make me miserable. There is a tragic time before us.'

Bryan laughed. 'You will be too much interested in your stage tragedies to indulge in tragedies off the stage. You treat me abominably. I should be indignant—if I knew how to be indignant with you. You would be kinder to me if you didn't know how helplessly I am your slave. In modern life, when Juliet loses her income, Romeo gives her up. But my constancy, you see, is superior to the freaks of fortune. I am reduced to eulogise myself, since you won't do it.'

'My love has nothing to do with eulogies. I suspect you most because you are careful to show me only your best side. But no matter; we shall be together for better or worse. You may not love me very much, Bryan, but you cannot do without me; you can love no other woman so well. If you could, no pity for me would prevent you. Ah, me! what a fool I am to be so wise. Well, what is to be done? Have you made any plans?'

'Plenty of 'em; and I'm ready to carry them out. Of course you know that your income under the new will is sufficient to live on comfortably; and you will be allowed to occupy the old house as long as you like. But my notion *is*, the sooner you are away from London the better. You can't begin anything here. Your friends would

swamp you with advice and objections. You must break away from all that and come to Paris. You have an immense advantage in being as much French as you are English. You can make your *début* and confirm your reputation on the French stage. After that, your English friends will be glad enough to be permitted to idolise you. You will need very little preparation; you have been through more training already than half the great actresses of our time. And not one of them had half your natural materials to start with. You will make them forget Rachel.'

Madeleine was listening with a more vivid expression than heretofore. Subtle movements passed through her. Her eyes opened and brightened, and her lips worked softly against each other. She drew her breath more deeply, and her bosom visibly rose and fell.

'It will be worth while!' she murmured; 'it will be worth everything! I can be happy in that. Oh, Bryan, we may be happy after all! When I am famous, you will be content with me. I shall be great for your sake. I have never been myself yet. You don't know what I can be! But how can I go to Paris?'

'You can go as Mrs. Bryan Sinclair.'

She pressed her hands together firmly. 'No; not that, yet,' she said.

'Come now! You're of marriageable age, aren't you? And your own mistress?'

'Yes; but I am nobody—I am not myself. You shall not marry me till I am a woman to be proud of. When I have made my success, then you can ask me, if you will.'

'That idea is not up to your usual originality. It's not the stage lady, whom the public sees, that I marry; but the woman at home, whom the public has no concern with. Pride of that kind is not worth the breath you give to it. How could you get along in Paris, and going to rehearsals, if you had no "Mrs." to fall back on?'

'Kate Roland will come with me.'

'Has she said so?'

'She knows nothing of my intention.'

'And she'll be certain not to approve of it, when she does know. She is dead against me, too. If you apply to her, there will be mischief. Aunt Maria would do better.'

'You know Aunt Maria is not her right self. Ever since last summer she has hardly seemed to know what she was about. She talks as if she were a young girl, sometimes, and as if she were expecting some lover to come for her. Poor old auntie! No; it would be worse than useless to have her, even if she could come.'

'Humph! I wish she could have kept her wits about her a few months longer. She was the only one of them who was on my side. What could have upset her?'

'Aunt Gertrude says it was the shock of hearing that I was to lose the estates. But Aunt Gertrude never tells the truth; and I think it must have been something different. Uncle Arthur has been

to see Aunt Maria very often; he hardly ever used to come before. But she certainly cannot come with me to Paris. It must be Kate Roland, or nobody.'

Bryan tapped his cane slowly upon the stone pavement. 'Then I should vote for nobody!' he remarked.

'I know what you mean, Bryan; you are making me choose between you and Kate. You want her out of the way, because you can neither bully her nor deceive her. She sees what you are—and so do I, too; only I love you, and she does not. Yes, my darling,' she went on, a wave of sad passionateness surging through her voice and brimming in her eyes, 'I know, in my heart of hearts, that you are not good; that you are ruined and desperate, in soul if not in fortune. And if I cared a rush for myself, I would leave you now, and never see you again. But all that is too late now. I had the opportunity last summer, and I would not take it—I made poor Stanhope go and bring you back. And since then you have kept Kate and me apart all you could; you would make us enemies if you could. But you may put away anxiety, if you have any. I am yours! I will leave everyone for you. If you wish me evil, you shall have the chance to do it. But I tell you, Bryan,' she continued, in a more majestic and victorious tone, 'that before the end comes, I will make you feel what it is to have been loved by a woman like me! You shall feel that I am worth more than all the world to you! And if you have ever done me wrong, in that time you will wish that you might sell your soul to put it right again!'

'Well done, Madey!' muttered Bryan, looking at her broodingly from beneath his red eyebrows. 'There is more stuff in you than there is in me, I verily believe; though I call myself second to no man. You can make my blood burn; and, upon my word, you can make me wish I was a better man—or a worse one!' He gave a short laugh. 'I have had visions of rocks ahead of us, too. And if you knew—what you may know, one of these days, perhaps you'd flinch from it. Come, I'll give you one more chance. Get up and go out of that door, and I'll give my word never to put eyes on you again. Off with you!'

After a moment's pause, Madeleine suddenly rose to her feet. Bryan started; but then, settling himself back upon the bench, he remained rigidly immovable, looking straight before him. But, after a little while, as Madeleine still remained near him, he looked up at her. She was smiling.

'Are you going?' he said, harshly.

'Not without you,' she replied, smiling afresh.

'Sit down again,' he said; and when she had complied, he added, 'Give me your hand.'

She put her hand in his.

'Now, Madeleine,' he continued, 'you belong to me. If there's any meaning in marriage, you are my wife. We're in church; and here are Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, to witness the act. You have

given yourself to me, for better or worse. Whatever other ceremony may be performed over us in the future, will be only a repetition of this, without the meaning that this has. I gave you your chance fairly You have thrown yourself away. I'll never give you the length of your little finger again. What have you got to say about it?'

She bent forward, and looked him in the eyes.

'I am not afraid of you, Bryan,' she said. 'My darling, there is nothing in me that shrinks from you. You cannot take me, so much as I give myself to you. I have more strength to give than you have to receive; it is you who will be afraid of me, at last. Poor boy—poor fellow! Ah, I love you! This great iron hand of yours is not so powerful as my heart.'

The stray visitors had passed out of the Poet's Corner, and left the young lady and gentleman to themselves. For as much as an hour, perhaps, the poets and they had their privacy undisturbed. When, at length, the latter emerged into the body of the church, they passed down the great aisle lingeringly, arm-in-arm. But on reaching the open air they parted, and went different ways.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Lady Mayfair, in trying to be kind to an inexperienced young gentleman, undergoes a novel experience of her own.

As a matter of social courtesy, if on no other account, some attention must be paid to that fortunate young nobleman, the fourteenth baron of Castlemere. As the inheritor of an ancient name and of large possessions, he was naturally an object of interest; and his position was further improved by romantic rumours as to the manner in which he had entered upon his inheritance. At the comparatively primitive period of which I am treating, the public press had developed nothing like the enterprise and penetration which characterise it at the present day; and information regarding his new lordship was therefore neither so copious nor so accurate as it would doubtless have been had he come up to town thirty years later. Nevertheless, a good deal of talk upon the subject was floating about. It was generally accepted, for example, that he had been born in foreign parts; France being mentioned as enjoying the best claim to the honour of being his birthplace. It was recalled that the late Lord Castlemere had, in his youth, been a great traveller and Radical; and it was not difficult to understand that, during his residence in the French capital, he had fallen deeply in love with a young lady of high rank, but who had embraced the communistic principles of the Revolution. On this affair

becoming known to the late baron's father, the latter had threatened him with disinheritance in the event of his marrying the fascinating fair republican. The connection had, accordingly, been ostensibly broken off; but, as a matter of fact, a secret wedding had taken place. Owing to the necessity of keeping this union from the knowledge of the lady's relatives, as well as from those of Mr. Vivian, the former personage feigned illness, and went to reside at a country seat belonging to her family, somewhere in the interior. At this point the story becomes vague; but it is plain that a son must have been born in this retreat; and it is quite conceivable that abundance of intrigue was brought into play to keep his birth from becoming known. But the difficulty of concealing an irregular baby would seem to be second only to that of disposing of a murdered corpse; and it cannot be doubted that Mrs. Vivian's family finally became cognisant of the embarrassing fact. At this juncture the young mother exhibited heroic qualities. Knowing that the announcement that she was Vivian's wife would occasion his disinheritance, she nobly refused to give her child a father, and even allowed it to be inferred that her connection with the individual in question had lacked the consecration of the Church. The consequence was, that her family excommunicated her; and (Vivian happening to be unavoidably absent at the time) she retired to a convent, or some such institution, and presently died there. The baby, however, survived; and—by what means it is unnecessary to inquire—was spirited away; and during many years its whereabouts remained an enigma. Meantime, the old baron had died, and Mr. Floyd Vivian had succeeded to the title and estates; his first act was to make inquiries after his lost wife; which inquiries resulted in the discovery that she was no more; and it was added (whether in good faith or with deliberate intent to deceive) that her infant had not survived her. Finding himself thus widowed and (as he believed) childless, at one blow, Lord Castlemere, like the well-conducted English nobleman that he was, immediately set about paying his addresses to another lady. The subsequent events were known. Children by the second marriage failing, Lord Castlemere adopted his niece, and educated her with a view to carrying on the name and dignities of the race. But just when he was settling comfortably down into a serene and respectable middle age, a disquieting report reached him that the son whom he had supposed to be dead still lived, having been smuggled off to America in charge of his nurse, who now, on her deathbed, had divulged the truth. To America, then, Lord Castlemere betook himself; but his expedition proved in vain. The old nurse was dead, and the child had again vanished, none knew whither. The fact was, he had been carried off by his uncle, who had received prior intelligence of his existence, and was naturally unwilling that his own offspring should suffer through so unreasonable a misfortune. Lord Castlemere died abroad, probably in consequence of the hardships incident to the savage character of the country to whose hospitality he had incautiously trusted himself.

And now, at the eleventh hour, the long-lost heir descends from the clouds, establishes his claim to the inheritance, and makes his appearance upon the social stage.

This, it will be conceded, was an admirably close approximation to the version of the fourteenth baron's vicissitudes which has been set forth in the preceding pages. Success is a great conciliator; and young Lord Castlemere having achieved the object of his existence, society was prepared to receive him with all due encouragement and cordiality. He was universally invited to dinner; and mothers manipulated their marriageable daughters with renewed hope. Ere long, however, a new object of speculation and discussion declared itself. In narrating the history of his early adventures, the amateur historians had taken it for granted that his lordship came into relation with the great world on the footing of unencumbered bachelorhood. But by degrees a whisper began to circulate that such was not precisely the case. In some way or other, a woman was mixed up in the affair. Was she a person in society? To this question no definite answer was forthcoming. Nobody could be found who had seen her, though several were in a position to affirm that she had been seen. It was certain, meanwhile, that she did not accompany Lord Castlemere about town, and that, consequently, he could not have made her existence officially known. The suggestion that she might not be what is generally recognised as a wife was too shocking and unmentionable not to find numerous supporters; but so long as she remained wholly invisible, there was small satisfaction even in that. The effect of so much mystery and ambiguity was greatly to increase Lord Castlemere's popularity; and he fed the flame by declining all but a few of the invitations sent to him. Indeed, his personal appearance was still so little known, that he might be riding in the park every day without being identified. Those who had been fed on stories of his American experience were on the look-out for a black-haired warrior, skimming along in Indian costume on a bare-backed mustang; but neither early nor late was any phenomenon answering that description to be met with in the Row. Such was the prevailing ambiguity, in short, with regard to the latest descendant of the Vivians, that after two or three months' inconclusive gossip, there were not wanting sceptics to declare they didn't believe there was ever any such person.

It was not quite so bad as that, however. One morning a note, in a slender white envelope, with a coat-of-arms on the seal, was brought to Lord Castlemere's residence by a footman in livery; and a few hours afterwards that nobleman presented himself at Lady Mayfair's door, and was straightway admitted to her private boudoir.

For the moment the boudoir was empty. It was a nearly square room, not too large, and beautifully fitted up. The walls were hung with pale yellow figured satin, the woodwork being of satin-wood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Above the mantelpiece was a picture,

by an Italian painter, of Pandora; she knelt beside the fatal box with her hand upon the lid; her beautiful countenance glancing over her shoulder at the spectator, with an expression half mischievous, half timid. It was noticeable that the features bore a singular likeness to Lady Mayfair's own. The mantelpiece and the fittings of the fireplace were of polished brass; the floor of dark inlaid wood, partly covered with Indian rugs. In the window was a large oblong box of porcelain, completely filling the embrasure, and mounded up with a bank of growing violets; and violets stood in vases upon the tables, and their fragrance perfumed the air. The furniture was mostly of the Chippendale pattern, and was upholstered in lavender-hued silk; but there were a couple of low easy-chairs facing the hearth which were constructed upon more luxurious principles than had ever entered into the mind of the above-mentioned famous manufacturer to conceive. A brass candelabra, filled with many wax candles of a purple tint, was suspended from the centre of the ceiling, and other candles stood in brass sconces affixed to the walls. But it was daylight still, and the candles were not alight. Lord Castlemere looked about him with the quiet comprehensiveness of observation that was characteristic of him; and perhaps contrasted the exquisite little scene before him with a wigwam in the Sacramento valley, with its festoons of scalps, its furniture of skins, and its swarthy and savage inhabitants They were the types of two very different species of luxury; which was, on the whole, preferable, it would need much argument to determine.

Lady Mayfair came in. A sort of flowing robe, elaborate in its simplicity, clothed her graceful figure; it fell in soft folds of purple silk, and at the throat and wrists were delicate films of lace. Her hair, of glistening brown, was bound in plain coils round her head, and one heavy lock fell upon her shoulder. The contours of her charming face were young, almost girlish; but the shifting expressions of her mouth and eyes betokened a maturity of experience which might have belonged to years much more advanced than hers appeared to be. She was, in fact, a woman of the world—of the great world; and a more nearly perfect specimen of her class did not perhaps exist. She met Lord Castlemere with a graceful smile.

'It is very good of you to come to me on such short notice and in this informal way,' she said. 'But there is no satisfaction in the brief glimpses one gets of one's friends at receptions and dinners; and I have wished to have a quiet chat with you since ever so long. Sit down here before the fire, and drink a cup of my tea, which I am going to make for you myself.'

To drink tea with Lady Mayfair alone in her boudoir was a distinction which no gentleman in London would not have intrigued to secure; but she disguised her favour so well that the young baron took it quite as a matter of course. He possessed, moreover, a natural dignity and tact which rendered him able to meet the great lady on terms comfortable to both. Polite protestations were as foreign to

him as fussy courtesies were to her. He was singularly free from self-consciousness; and she was so exquisitely self-conscious as completely to conceal it. Thus, by opposite paths, they approached, so far as outward demeanour was concerned, to pretty much the same level of good manners.

'Are you less of a hermit than you were?' she asked him. 'By what I hear, London sees less of you than it thinks it has a right to expect.'

'It seems to me I meet a good many people,' Lord Castlemere replied. 'But I myself hardly know the son of my father yet; and until I do, I don't wish to introduce him to other people.'

'That sculptor was a very pleasant fellow; I sometimes wish him back again,' remarked her ladyship, archly. 'He left a design on my hands for a group; I fear it will never become bronze now. He left no disciples behind him.'

'He has taken up a more difficult business,' said the other, stirring his tea.

'And I suppose I must confess—a better one, both for him and for us.'

'No, not better. It's only fate, as Bryan would say. I shall never understand the barons of England as well as I understood the wolves and Indians of California.'

'You would not go back to wolves and Indians, though?'

'That is what makes me say I don't know myself. I see what I am most fit for; and yet I stick to something else, and say it's fate.'

'Fate is a classic word, I believe, but it means too many things. When you are as wise as I am, you will know that men—and women too—never follow their intellectual convictions. There is no such thing as an intellectual conviction. If there were, everybody would have to come to think alike on all subjects, thousands of years ago. But you want to do a thing—you set your heart upon it—and then you justify yourself by inventing all sorts of arguments to make your wish appear reasonable. Is your tea sweet enough? That is the origin of all religions and all philosophies. This London life that we lead is very easy to satirise, and very easy for those who cannot belong to it to despise; and we who are in it may grumble, and say that something else would suit us better. But we never abandon it of our own free will; because, really, the world has nothing better. Science, and art, and literature exist only for our benefit and amusement, and without us they would die. Even religion has become little more than an opportunity for our new bonnets, and for the headings of royal proclamations. We are at the very centre of all life; and those who are not of us live only by the life which we transmit to them. So if you don't make my bronze group for me, by becoming one of the barons of England you will be the cause of other bronze groups being made. The stronger the heart is, you know, the more active the whole body.'

'I think there is truth in some of that,' observed Lord Castle-

mere, emptying his cup. 'But other people besides us fall in love, and hate, and sin, and die; there is plenty of life in those things; and they would go on even if we came to an end.'

'At all events, you will find a use for your genius for sculpture in moulding the fortunes of the State,' returned Lady Mayfair, softening the grandeur of the phrase by the smile with which she uttered it. 'Have you chosen your side in politics?'

'What is there to choose?' his lordship inquired.

'I am a Tory myself, because I am an unprotected female; but I'm not sure that I should advise you to be one—at least, not at first. Of course it depends upon the solidity of one's social position—one's wealth and rank, and so forth. I should think you might afford to be a Liberal for several years to come. Liberals often promote Conservative interests more directly and picturesquely than Conservatives themselves can; and young men often find more piquancy in looking over the edge of things than in arranging matters inside. But in deciding that question, you must take into consideration the sort of woman you mean to marry.'

'Must I get married?'

'Have you any objection to it?' the great lady asked lightly. But there was a vestige of something like curiosity behind the laughing glance with which she awaited his reply.

'I haven't thought about it at all,' was all he happened to say.

'At the worst it ought to be a useful step,' observed Lady Mayfair after a pause, dropping her eyes to the cluster of violets in her bosom, and caressing their petals with dainty finger-tips: 'and it is capable of being much more than that. At first sight there does seem to be something rather clumsy in nature's division of us into male and female; but, after all, we turn it to very good account. We are all selfish creatures, but love is the wisest form of selfishness; and when that is over, society can be better entertained by a man and a woman than by either alone. Even if they live apart in great measure, or one of them dies, the fact that they have been married is of the greatest convenience to them; unmarried people are bound hand and foot; the men because they are dangerous, and the women because they are in danger. There is only one thing more stupid than not to marry, and that is to be divorced—unless, of course, the match was a bad one, and you make a better. And even so there would be a difficulty if there had been children.'

Lady Mayfair uttered this wisdom, not in a formal or didactic manner, but with pauses interspersed, and slight, careless changes of attitude, and a variety of gentle and genial modulations in her voice. Lord Castlemere listened with an attention which was itself a flattery.

'Do you believe,' he inquired, after looking thoughtfully at his interlocutor for a moment or two, 'that the people you call "we" are really different from the others; or is the difference only in what things we and the others think worth doing or not doing?'

'But would not that be all the difference in the world?' replied the lady, kindly. 'Can we not do all that the others can ever wish to do, and a great deal more besides?'

'The people that I have met about here—the aristocrats, I mean—always behave as if they were pleased with one another, and everything were right and comfortable. They smile, but laugh seldom, and never fly into a rage or cry. It was not so with other persons I have lived with. Is that the price of being what we are—to lose all power of joy and grief and anger?'

'Oh, we may feel all passions,' replied her ladyship, somewhat amused, 'but it is the distinction of a high civilisation not to let one's feelings appear.'

'What is the reason of that?'

'Life moves more easily.'

'But if the passions are there? I could imagine getting along easily enough if I had no passions—only that I should not feel alive at all.'

'One has to forego some things in order to gain others.'

'I see no gain. To hide what I am can help neither me nor you.'

'It may relieve me from feeling pain about you; and you know Christianity demands that we should spare one another pain.'

'I don't know much about Christianity, except that Christ is God showing Himself through a man. I cannot hide what I am from Him, and why should I spare you pain which He must go on feeling?'

'My dear Lord Castlemere, I fear we are drifting towards a theological discussion, to which I am unequal. All I meant was, that, as we are not perfect, and there is no present prospect of our becoming so, the best thing we can do is to act as if we were. To display all our evil impulses would surely be to encourage their remaining with us. Out of sight, out of mind.'

'To cover up an ugly thing is not the way to make it beautiful; by keeping it in sight we might find some way of making it better. I don't like your civilisation, Lady Mayfair. I might as well bind my hands and feet and stop my breath. I like to be like other men; and if to be civilised were to walk on stilts, or to paint one's face blue, or to stand naked in the street, I would do it. But why should I pretend to be what I am not? I was born to be myself, and that I shall always be, no matter what I do. Sometimes things seem to me to be shadows or dreams, but your civilisation would make me a shadow's shadow. Why, Lady Mayfair, you know what it is to love a man—you have given yourself all up to him? or may be you had a child and it died? or you have done some wickedness, such as other women have done, and all might do? Wasn't there delight or reality in that? Did you not feel the warmth and weakness and the strength of all other women alive in you then? When you are alone, and your memory looks back at what you have done and felt, do not those things stand above all the rest?'

'I see you are a poet as well as a sculptor,' said Lady Mayfair, rather faintly. There was an unwonted flush in her cheeks, and, as she looked at him, she drew shorter breath, and a glowing languor shone in her lovely eyes.

Lord Castlemere had risen to his feet almost at the beginning of this outburst, and at the words, 'Why, Lady Mayfair,' he had walked close up to where she sat, and stood looking down upon her. He was aroused, full of masculine energy, concentrated, dominant; no object better worth regarding had faced Lady Mayfair for many a day. He put her wholly on her defence; and yet she would not have cared to defend herself, had she known her defence secure.

'I knew an Indian girl once,' the young baron continued, 'whose skin was as brown as your eyes, but her hand was as soft as yours; and no woman ever loved a man more tenderly and faithfully than she loved me, or more passionately. Nothing was hidden between us. We used few words, but we knew what we meant. We lived in a wigwam; she cooked the deer and bear that I shot with my arrows, and the fish that I caught; we slept rolled up in buffalo skins. We had a child—a little daughter. My friend Hugh Berne used to tell me that I should never be so happy as I was then. I wish I had known then what I know now! I have never spoken of her before; I could not! When she was carried off, I did not follow her. Since then I have found out that she died, following me, as she thought; she came eastward, but never got as far as the old village on the coast that I used to tell her of. But, when she died, some traders took the child from her, and brought it on, and gave it to me at last. Civilisation would not have done more than that, would it? Kooahi had put round its neck the necklace of wampum that I gave her when we first loved each other. I have brought the child here with me. I shall never have another. She will inherit Castlemere. Only I think it might be best if I took her away from this, and went back with her to the Sacramento valley. What do you think, Lady Mayfair?'

'Oh, no—no, my dear friend—may I call you that? You will not find us all so heartless and formal as you suppose.' The tone in which she spoke, her aspect and her attitude, said more than her words.

But Lord Castlemere's mind was fixed on other things. He seated himself again, and rested his cheek on his hand. His excited mood ebbed by degrees, leaving depression. But during many months he had kept a reserve that was not normal to his character. The pressure of new things, not less than the memory of old, had made him silent. To-day, it seemed, he was in the vein to speak.

'No, I won't go back,' he said. 'I should be a fool to think I can do as I will. Something always says "you must"—Luck, or Fate, or God—I don't know what. My life was settled before I began to live. I am my father's son; dead men rule the living. This inheritance of mine was a fine thing, I thought; but there's

blood upon it. For more than seven years the papers lay inside the ribs of the man I killed, buried beneath a rock; and when I went back the rock was torn away for me to find them there. I must go on, and take my little girl with me. I hope she will get to a better light than I shall.'

Several of these sentences were wholly unintelligible to Lady Mayfair, but she did not like them the less for being ominous and mysterious. When a woman of the world has said to herself that a man is worth encouraging, nothing short of jealousy or ridicule (and these not always) will serve to disenchant her. Lady Mayfair, who had begun to think that it would be amusing to obtain the credit, so to speak, of Lord Castlemere by making him her *protégé*, indoctrinating him in worldly affairs, and using him, perhaps, as the instrument of her social and political intrigues—had unexpectedly found herself upon another footing than she anticipated. But we will not pause here to investigate this phenomenon. His lordship remained unconscious of having produced any impression, good or bad; he was too much preoccupied with his own emotions and speculations for that; and, moreover, he had never been trained to observe the effect upon the opposite sex of his utterances and behaviour. He was in a quandary, and prone to take his course rashly or passionately. In fact the thing that he needed, and vaguely felt that he needed, was experience. He had been forcibly and unexpectedly thrown out of the lines of earlier existence, and he had found speculation and theory wholly incapable of preparing him for the existence to come. He must experiment, blindly and recklessly, in order to arrive at a practical understanding of the new things amidst which he was placed. Meanwhile he was like a race-horse, quivering with potential achievement but ignorant of his right direction. Men bred amidst the vast solitudes and influences of nature are generally calm in their outward bearings, because the intensity of life within them is at once stimulated and appeased by their environment. But when the same men are transplanted into hot-bed cities, with millions of human creatures running to and fro confusedly about them on a thousand different errands, their calmness is apt to give way; the vital fire still burning in their souls as ardently as before, but there being nothing outside to keep it within bounds.

And yet the last sentence is too sweeping. Providence never seems to leave men entirely to the destructive tendencies of their own characters. Lord Castlemere, for example, had at least two salutary checks put upon him; one of which was his little daughter, while the other was something to which he could scarcely have given a name, but which was incarnate in the black-eyed fascination of a woman whom he had met but thrice, yet who stood to him in the place of a divinity and almost of a conscience. It is no discredit to Lady Mayfair's penetration to say that she was wholly unsuspicious of the latter influence in her friend's problem. On the contrary, she surmised a regrettable vacancy in that direction, and perhaps fancied

she knew some one who could supply it. She looked at his lordship very warmly.

'My dear lord,' she said, laying her finger-tips lightly on his sleeve, so as to indicate that he was to resume his place beside her. 'You must not try to see and settle everything in a moment. You must let me be your friend. I will try to make you willing to be mine. You have a great and splendid career before you; I would not dare to tell you how splendid I believe it will be. You have all the intellectual ability of the best men of our class, and you have in addition much that they can never attain—originality, freshness, genius. Begin slowly; time, as well as the world and nature, are on your side. Come and see me often; this room, into which no other man comes, will always be open to you. Bring your little girl with you; I care for her already for your sake. If you are bothered or unhappy give me a chance to help you. I am not without knowledge of this world that seems so strange to you; not without influence in it either. I have been unhappy, as well as you, Lord Castlemere, and disappointed, and—rebellious! Ah, my friend—I could tell you——'

Here there was a discreet knock at the door. A shade crossed Lady Mayfair's face. She leaned back in her chair (she had been bending towards Castlemere, and her soft hand had just touched his own) and said—

'Come in.'

'Please, your ladyship, the Marquis of Piccadilly is below,' said the servant.

After a brief pause Lady Mayfair replied—

'I gave orders that I was at home to no one.'

The servant bowed and withdrew.

'I was just going,' said Lord Castlemere, rising.

Lady Mayfair rose also, and placed herself before him, looking up in his face.

'Don't go,' she said, in a low voice. 'I would not see him, because—shall I tell you?—he came to ask me to marry him, and I have made up my mind that I won't have him!'

'How long since you made up your mind to that?' his lordship inquired.

'I don't know. You have not been here long. Sit down again,' answered Lady Mayfair, with a faint blush and smile.

CHAPTER XL.

In which two new characters are introduced, and the story enters upon a new phase.

THE Grandison Club, St. James's, although it made no discrimination between Whig and Tory, was eminently an aristocratic institution. The bulk of its members were not so much men of light and leading as of land and lineage. It had traditions extending back for nearly a hundred years, and its present prosperity was worthy of its past reputation. If it did not give a policy to Parliament, it gave direction to the higher social development. The time-darkened portraits on the walls of its smoking-room had been made parties to passages of high-life anecdote and gossip which, could they have revealed them, might perceptibly have modified the judgments of the contemporary historian. Clubs are considered to be one of the highest products of an artificial civilisation, but it may be questioned whether they do not tend in some measure to deter that consummation of which they are supposed to be the best illustration. The secrets which impose upon the world are brought to light in the club; it beholds and discusses the frailties and shortcomings of the specious social organism which it professes to recommend. Like Penelope of old, it disentangles by night the web it weaves during the day. Nor is the fact of ill augury; since otherwise we might be in danger of getting so deeply enmeshed in the toils of our own hypocrisies as to render extrication a desperate enterprise.

The Marquis of Piccadilly was one of the pillars of the Grandison Club; not that he was himself an antique personage; he had only arrived at that age when it might be said of him 'He is still a young man.' But his forefathers had been connected with the club from its earliest foundation, and he had, as it were, inherited their membership along with their other good attributes. The marquis was one of those bachelors who live in the constant contemplation of a possible marriage; and who thereby inflict the most wearing anxiety upon the mothers of marriageable young women. For a bachelor who is always on the verge of becoming a Benedict is apt to be the least likely of all bachelors to overstep that verge; like the man who lived within a mile of Niagara and never went to see the Falls, because the distance was so inconsiderable. Lord Piccadilly's engagement to most of the beauties and heiresses of the day had, at various times, been reported; but a Lady Piccadilly had yet to make her appearance. Possibly an unmarried man who was also a member of the Grandison had less chance of bettering his condition than the generality of his species; the club affording such special facilities for becoming acquainted with the ways and means of the diviner sex, as to leave little or no new ground for matrimony to explore. Be that as it may, Lord Piccadilly

had come to be regarded, by all his associates except himself, as one of the most inveterate single men about town; and in this repute he remained up to the middle of the summer season preceding the autumn of our latter chapters. Then a rumour began to circulate that something was the matter between him and Lady Mayfair. So well-founded did this rumour prove, that, before the season was over, his lordship was said to have confided to an intimate friend that he had made up his mind to make Lady Mayfair his wife. The match was so entirely unlooked for as to seem probable; and the betting gradually changed from ten to one against the lady, to five to four in her favour. The latter were the odds as quoted on the day when Lord Castlemere had the interview with her ladyship, a portion whereof has just been described. But after that there was a collapse. The marquis suddenly disappeared; and it was not until some time in the following spring that society received the information that he had been met travelling in the Levant. Lady Mayfair, meanwhile, remained in London, and it was evident that the Marquis had ceased to have any share in her arrangements. Certain indications even seemed to suggest a notion that she had been making arrangements with some one else. And this some one else was a personage who had, of late, been attracting the notice of the fashionable world in more ways than one.

On a certain afternoon in May, as old Captain Cavendish was turning over the pages of the 'Army and Navy Gazette' in the smoking-room, with his box of rappee open on the table beside him, young Fred Beauchamp came in, with a riding-whip in his hand, and a cigar in his mouth. He walked up to the mantelpiece, struck a light, and said—

'Morning, captain!'

'Mornin',' returned the captain, in a jaundiced tone. The captain had fought under Wellington, and in personal appearance was said to resemble that great soldier. He himself, at all events, thought so, and arranged himself upon that theory. The heavy hook-nose was already there; the stern, magisterial manner, the terse speech, and the white waistcoat were points of detail which the captain was careful not to omit. That he was not also a duke was the fault of an unappreciative nation, not his own. It was an oversight upon which the captain was capable of waxing eloquent, and which inclined him to be tetchy on subjects in no way connected with the army. A world which could neglect Captain Cavendish was, indeed, capable of anything; and the captain's hook-nose, though it had not brought him the professional distinction which he merited, was a symbol of the remarkably keen scent he had for the social and moral obliquities of his fellow creatures.

'Heard the news?' inquired Mr. Beauchamp.

'Humph! what's wrong now?' demanded the other, resorting to his snuff-box.

'Best thing could happen. Castlemere's elected.'

'The club is going to the devil. Too many boys in it already. Better men, sir, than he will ever be have been waiting ten years, begad, for a ballot; and now this young whipper-snapper must be passed over their heads! Shameful! Not that I'm surprised; not a bit of it! Ha!'

'Castlemere is a capital fellow; worth a dozen of that milk-and-water old father of his. You don't know him as I do, captain. I've been showing him the way about London. He was a little strange at first, but he's picked up amazingly these last months. You ought to see him ride, too; never knew such a fellow across country. Been brought up with the savages in America, you know, and all that sort of thing. Deuced good-looking chap; all the women in love with him. Must have been married once, though, or something of the kind: got a kid, you know—queer little dark thing, with straight black hair; Castlemere's awful fond of her. It was thought, you know, last year, that he had a wife or something alive; but that's all gammon. He might marry any woman he liked. They say it was he cut out old Piccadilly last winter. Shouldn't wonder if it was true. I know the Mayfair is uncommonly gracious to him. I can't make out what he thinks of her, though; he's such an awfully dark fellow about some things. But I like that in him; I don't care for a fellow to tell me all he thinks and feels, you know. When you know him, you'll like him as much as I do. I'll introduce you to him if you say so.'

'I'll apply to you when I feel the need of making his lordship's acquaintance,' replied the captain, with grim sarcasm. 'But you mustn't expect me to keep up the pace, at my age, with two wild young bloods like you and him. How early in the day is he usually drunk?'

'Oh, some days he's not drunk at all,' the other gentleman answered frankly. 'And he's got lots of ability, and all that sort of thing, you know. Shouldn't wonder if he took his seat in the Upper House before long, and made a hit there. He wants to be just like the rest of us—he told me that; though I don't believe Castlemere ever will be quite like other fellows; and that's one reason why I like him so much. I don't care for a fellow to be just like every other fellow, you know. He's awfully blue at times, Castlemere is; gets hipped when you wouldn't expect it; I fancy all fellows who have a lot in 'em do that. You never can tell what they may be thinking of—d'you know what I mean?'

'You express yourself very well, sir: when your friend has got a lot in him—that is after dinner, I suppose—you never can tell what he'll be up to next. As to his getting the blues, I should say a man who was making love to one woman, and having black-haired children by another who wasn't his wife, and getting drunk between times, might very easily be subject to occasional fits of depression.' Here the captain took snuff with the air of a man who feels that he has delivered himself epigrammatically. Mr. Beauchamp looked at his

companion rather doubtfully; but before he could make up his mind as to whether he was being chaffed or not, the door opened, and Bryan Sinclair came in.

'Heard the news?' was his first inquiry.

'Mr. Beauchamp has just favoured me with it,' said the captain. 'Lord Castlemere is a friend of yours also, is he?'

'I can't say he is exactly. But I was speaking of Lord Piccadilly. He arrived in London this morning, bearing with him the spoils of the East. I understand he means to set the fashion of smoking chibouques and sitting cross-legged.'

'He and Castlemere were rivals, I'm told. Does his return mean a renewal of operations?'

'I heard something of that affair,' said Sinclair, running his tongue between his lips, and inclining his head to one side. 'I don't imagine this new man—Castlemere do you call him?—will stand in the marquis's way, if the marquis chooses to go on. Castlemere is nothing but a boy; the lady has been kind to him, no doubt; but nothing more, I take it.'

'Ha!' said the captain, half closing his eyes, and rubbing the back of his head sceptically.

'It's extraordinary how much like Wellington he is at times,' observed Sinclair, in an aside tone, to Beauchamp. 'That was his Grace's tone and gesture, to a hair.'

The captain blew his nose resoundingly, partly to indicate that he had not heard this piece of criticism, and partly to conceal the gratification with which it had irradiated his features. 'By the bye, Sinclair,' he then said, 'I think of having a few good men to dine at my quarters on Wednesday week; I was going to ask you if you'd join us?'

'Wednesday week? Afraid I can't manage it, my dear Cavendish. I shall probably be leaving England on Saturday next. I'm very sorry.'

'Leaving England in May!' exclaimed Beauchamp. 'By Jove! Where on earth can a fellow go in May? You're as bad as Piccadilly.'

'I shall probably be back by the end of June,' returned the other. 'I shall run down to Copenhagen, and make a trip among the fiords and mountains for a week or two. Maybe I shall get still higher north—that's as it happens. Hullo, Maurice! you're a stranger.'

Sir Stanhope had entered, and was standing just within the doorway as Sinclair spoke; he wore a look of agitation that was scarcely disguised. 'I'm very glad to find you here,' he said, eyeing Sinclair with a peculiar intentness.

'Thanks—same to you! Anything going on!'

'Haven't you heard the news?'

'Everybody's got news to-day, begad!' exclaimed the captain. 'It's as good as a newspaper office.'

'What's the matter, Stanhope?' said Sinclair, carelessly. 'Anything that concerns me?'

Maurice came up to his chair and said in a low voice, 'Can you come outside for a minute? It concerns you terribly.'

'Not enough to spoil my dinner, I hope?' returned Sinclair, laughing. 'Well, come along. I was just going across to Bond Street. *Au revoir*, Cavendish; bye-bye, Beauchamp!'

When they were in the street he turned upon Stanhope and asked, 'What the deuce is it, man? You look as if you'd lost your digestion!'

'Do you know where Madeleine Vivian is?' demanded Stanhope, very gravely.

'To be sure I do. In her aunt's house in Wimpole Street.'

'When did you see her last?'

'Let me see; the day before yesterday afternoon. Not that I see what business it is of yours, my good fellow.'

'Only this—that she has gone off and left no trace of herself. To tell you the truth, I thought you had gone with her. I'm glad to find I was mistaken.'

'Gone? What do you mean?' said Sinclair, grasping the other's arm, and speaking between his teeth. 'Who has gone with her?'

'No one. Neither Kate Roland nor any one knows more about it than I do. I thought she might have said something to you that would give us a clue——'

'Stop!' said Sinclair, who appeared to have been thinking intensely; 'have you tried America?'

'America?'

'It's only a guess—but there may be something in it. There's no time to be lost. Meet me at my rooms at five o'clock—an hour from this time. I shall be ready then to do whatever can be done. Till five o'clock, adieu!'

The next moment Sinclair had hailed a hansom and driven off, leaving Stanhope on the pavement. Sinclair, when he was out of his friend's range of vision, rubbed his chin with his gloved hand, and chuckled silently. But afterwards a gloomier expression gradually settled upon his bold and ambiguous features.

CHAPTER XLI.

In which Bryan indulges to the full his inimitable vein of humour; and proposes a scheme for the benefit of Lady Mayfair's heart, which has the effect of upsetting her nerves.

Two days previous to the meeting of Bryan and Maurice at the club, Bryan, clad in morning attire of the most unexceptionable fashion and quality, had made a call on Lady Mayfair. His acquaintance with this lady had begun a good many years ago, and had at one period been more intimate than her nearest friends probably suspected.

He now saw much less of her than formerly; yet the easy terms on which he stood with her were apparent in the fact that he was always admitted to her presence without delay or question, and treated with an absence of formality that most men would have envied. The present occasion proved no exception to the rule; the footman who opened the door bowed him upstairs at once, without previously 'inquiring whether her ladyship was at home,' and he was ushered immediately into the presence of the Queen of London Society.

Bryan appeared to be in a most genial and engaging frame of mind.

'How charming you look to-day, Alexandra!' he exclaimed, throwing himself into a chair, as soon as they were alone together. 'I owe you an immense debt, as embodying for me my ideal of what a lady of rank and fashion ought to be. Not to speak of other debts, too numerous to mention, and to which you yourself, with a delicacy too rare in this vain-glorious world, have forborne ever to allude. Really, you are an almost perfect woman; and I despair of ever repaying you a tithe of your favours; especially as I am now about to increase the balance against me.'

Lady Mayfair looked at him with an expression on her beautiful face which her friends, who were accustomed to see her all smiles and graciousness, would have been surprised to behold there. It told of weariness, hopelessness, and aversion controlled by fear. It made her look old, dimmed the brightness of her eyes, and traced lines round the corners of her mouth, and across her brow. Her hands moved nervelessly in her lap, as she asked in a voice without resonance—

'What is it now, Bryan?'

'What is it now?' repeated he, comically mimicking her tone. 'My dear soul, what is the matter with you? Now that I look at you more closely, I believe your nerves are out of order. I see how it is; your devotion to the interests of others has overstrained your sensitive organisation. You need change of scene, and rest. A trip to the continent would be just the thing for you; and by the bye—curiously enough—that is precisely what I came to suggest to you! How fortunately things turn out! A week or so in Paris will be capital for both of us—for you because you need it, and for me because I need you!' While saying this, Bryan smilingly drew off his gloves, and deposited them in his immaculate silk hat, which he placed upon an inlaid table. He then folded his arms, and contemplated Lady Mayfair benignantly.

'I don't understand what you mean; but I cannot leave London at present,' she said, after some pause. 'If you require money, of course I will do what I can——'

'Now, Alexandra, this is unkind!' interrupted Bryan, with a humorously pathetic air. 'You will never believe in my reform. Money, forsooth! Did I not travel to the ends of the earth for the

express purpose of making a fortune for myself directly from the bosom of nature, without injury or loss to any other human being? Did I not attain my pious object? and have I ever borrowed a fi'pun note of you since? No, no! Money is beneath me—so long at all events as I have my pockets full of it; and what I want of you, my dear creature, is not pecuniary supplies, but moral support. Yes, moral support!' And here Bryan shook his great shoulders, and chuckled.

Lady Mayfair shuddered slightly, as her eyes wandered over her hilarious visitor, and her lips moved silently. 'I suppose you will explain,' she said at length.

'You are so frigid and discouraging,' rejoined Bryan ruefully. 'You know how timid I am in the presence of ladies, and you take advantage of it. Ah, Alexandra, why cannot you be to me as you once were? There was a time—eh, wasn't there? or have you forgotten it? Heartless woman! I believe you have. Would I could rival your impassiveness! But I never can; my nature is as susceptible and simple as a child's, and yet, though wax to receive, 'tis marble to retain. Indeed, were my natural memory to fail me, I have always, you know, this *memoria technica* to fall back upon.' So saying, he drew from his pocket a bundle of letters and other documents tied up with a blue ribbon; drew his thumb across the edge of them, as one ruffles a pack of cards, and returned them to their place. 'Blessed relics!' he exclaimed, folding his hands over his breast with a romantic air; 'worlds should not buy you of me; and yet she who penned you would deny her own handwriting now—if she could!'

'Why will you remind me how much I hate you?' demanded Lady Mayfair, her slender hands tightening on the arms of her chair. 'I should like to forget that!'

'How naturally you say that! just as if you meant it!' remarked Bryan, with undiminished good-humour. 'What mysteries and enigmas you women are—dear delightful riddles! And, bless my stars! how you must enjoy deluding and tyrannising over us poor artless men! Seriously, my lovely Alexandra, just consider your own position for a moment. Here you are, practically at the head of the wealthiest and proudest society in the world. You are reverenced, admired, worshipped. Dukes sue for your fair hand; to be seen in your drawing-room is a brevet of nobility; you set the fashion in bonnets and pelisses; your reputation is spotless; your career is splendid. And with all, and in spite of all, how entirely you are a woman! No one would believe how much so—who didn't know. Why, fancy what a sensation it would create if I, after leaving you, were to drive down to the club, and say to any chance knot of fellows smoking their cigars in the coffee-room, "Ah! you think you know Lady Mayfair, do you? Do you know, then, that a certain number of years ago—she being newly a widow, and susceptible—she met a man, a plain, rough man, very much such a fellow as I am (or was),

for instance, and that she fell in love with him? Would you believe that when, in an ecstasy of bewilderment and delight, this man who so resembled myself professed a return of her passion, she lavished upon him the whole wealth of her maiden—I mean, widowed—affections; that she wrote him quantities of passionate love letters, which he always carries in his pocket; that she consented to contract a secret marriage with him, and that, on a certain day, a ceremony actually took place, which——"'

'Oh! why does God let such a demon live?' cried Lady Mayfair in a low voice, clasping her hands in her lap.

'You interrupt my eloquence!' said Bryan reproachfully. 'I was going on, of course, to explain that the ceremony in question subsequently turned out null and void, owing to the tender consideration of her lover, who, fearing she might repent the rash step she was taking, had the generosity (although he was so like myself) to employ an amateur priest to tie an imitation marriage knot. And yet this devoted woman, whose reputation is without a flaw, never failed (though separated from her imitation husband) to supply him from her abundance with all such substantial necessaries as he from time to time required—paid him large annuities, in fact, only not to say that he had ever pretended to marry her at all; and would do so this very day, if requested, though (alas for human fickleness!) she is now in love with another man, and he with another woman—do you know all this? (I would say to the knot of fellows round the club fire), and if you don't, do you pretend to say you know Lady Mayfair? Then, taking from my pocket——'

'I cannot feel any more torture,' interposed her ladyship quietly. 'You may as well tell me now what brings you here, and then leave me.'

'If I didn't know what an arch, jocose creature you are,' said Bryan, 'you would hurt my feelings—upon my word you would! But there! we understand each other. As to what brought me here, it is, as I intimated, a matter for our mutual advantage. To begin with, we are both in love; and we have hopes—or at least expectations—of our love being returned.'

'You may assume what you please,' said her ladyship, striving to speak indifferently, 'so far as I am concerned.'

'You are in love with Jack—I beg his pardon! with Lord Castlemere—of course; that is just what I was going to say. And I, for my part, am in love (*pace* my hopeless passion for you) with Madeleine Vivian. Now, it so happens, as you are doubtless aware, that these two young people have certain common interests; or, to speak more accurately, they have an interest in common. A large fortune is, or was, in dispute between them; and the gentleman got it. This gentleman happens to be, like myself, one of those simple-hearted, chivalrous creatures whose tendency it is to give way to all manner of Quixotic and magnanimous impulses; and when, therefore, he realises the fact that the other party in the suit is left approxi-

mately penniless, and is also young and handsome, what does he do by way of compensating her for the discourtesy of the law in deciding against her?—he incontinently goes and makes her the offer of his hand and possessions; she accepts him; they are married; poetical justice is done, and you and I are left in the lurch to console each other as best we may!'

'You—you are telling me a falsehood!' said Lady Mayfair, her cheeks flaming, and then becoming deadly pale.

Bryan leaned back in his chair and chuckled. 'By Jove! you are worse hit even than I thought,' he said: 'what a wonderful thing a woman's heart is! what recuperative power, eh? No, no, reassure yourself, my dear; I was only telling you, in a lively and dramatic style, what would shortly occur, if you and I don't put our heads together to prevent it. I needn't point out to you, I suppose, that you would make Jack a much better wife than Madeleine would; and, on the other hand, that it better accords with my experience than with his unsophisticatedness to manage the caprices of so capricious and wilful a young lady as Miss Madeleine. I propose, therefore, that we should do what in us lies to prevent their fatal meeting; and to that end, that you should chaperone Madeleine on a trip to Paris.'

'Is that all?' demanded Lady Mayfair, seeing that he paused.

'What more? And now you see with what undeserved severity you have been treating me.'

'There must be more. You would not have subjected me to all that devilish torture, only to require of me such a thing as this. You are keeping back something, and it must be something very wicked—even for you. You may as well tell me what it is. Oh, Bryan Sinclair, you need not fear to injure yourself in my estimation! It would take a very black crime not to look as white as a virtue compared with what I know your heart to be!'

Bryan clapped his hands. 'Brava! Alexandra the Great; that was a touch of your old vivacity. Love is renewing your youth. Well, one good turn deserves another. The fact is, my charming comrade, I must get Madeleine away from London. The propinquity of her friends and relatives is injurious to her, and hostile to my interests. I desire to remove her from these harmful influences, and to place her where she can enjoy the undisturbed advantage of my companionship, and be inaccessible to, and concealed from, everybody else. But the young lady is wilful, as I said, and capricious; she will, I fear, object to take the simple course of accepting my sole escort; she will want some third person to set her conventional scruples at rest; and who, my dear Alexandra, is so fitted to win her confidence as you? With your support, she would set out for Tartarus at an hour's notice, and be convinced that it was a very aristocratic and fashionable region.'

'Do you say she loves you?' asked Lady Mayfair, quietly as before, but with an intonation much as if she had inquired whether

the girl were to die on the rack. The evident unconsciousness with which she delivered the thrust caused it to penetrate Bryan's skin more sharply than the most violent deliberate blow would have done. His face hardened, and his manner changed.

'She loves me enough for my purposes,' said he.

'Is it your purpose to marry her?'

'That is no concern of yours. You had better be satisfied with what I choose to tell you, Alexandra. She goes to Paris to make her *début* on the stage, and I take a friendly interest in her success. You will be ready to give her board and lodging in the meantime. That's all you need to know.'

'You mean to ruin her,' said Lady Mayfair, while her eyes began to darken, 'and you intend to make me your stalking-horse. You mean to use my house, and the trust she places in me, as one woman in another, to—— Ah, this is worthy of you; this is the most hideous of all! If I were the most shameless and degraded of womankind, I think an insult like this ought to go far towards expiating my sin. You dare to suggest this to me, Bryan Sinclair, and you sit there and expect me to answer you! Get out of my sight, you loathsome creature—or shall I call my scullions to kick you out of my door?'

Bryan rose to his feet, with a terrible smile on his face, and stepping up to Lady Mayfair, who had also risen, he laid his grasp on her arm. They stood thus for a moment or two, looking into each other's eyes. At last, Bryan loosed his grip, and the woman fell back into her chair, an uncontrollable tremor pervading her from head to foot.

'You must not let yourself get excited, Alexandra,' said Bryan, in a voice as cold and malignant as poison turned to ice. 'Your voice is not melodious when raised, and your nerves, as you see, do not obey your will. When will you be ready to set out for Paris?'

'No, I cannot!' said Lady Mayfair, hiding her face in her shaking hands. 'Don't do it, Bryan!' she continued, looking up at him with a kind of wild misery. 'Deny yourself this one thing! When it is done, what is it? Have you not made despair enough in the world?'

'My good creature, you must be delirious: I am anxious about you!' said Bryan. 'You certainly must have an immediate change of air. You must start for Paris to-morrow morning.'

'I will not do it!' said Lady Mayfair, bending her body forward on her knees, and pressing her clenched hands against her temples, in the agony of her resistance.

'You will do it, Mrs. Sinclair!'

'Thank God, I am not quite that!' she said, with a half-frenzied laugh.

'My friends at the club——'

'Tell them! tell them! Such shame will be delicious—compared to the other!'

'My poor soul,' said Bryan slowly, and after a pause, 'you are

certainly not yourself this afternoon. I am the least exacting of men. I wouldn't for the world hurry you in your packing. I will come here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock precisely. At that time I shall find you gracious, amiable, smiling, and impatient to be off for Paris. It would cost me an uneasy night if I could believe that your mental aberration would last any longer than till ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Were it to do so, of course I should have to take such measures as would prevent you from continuing to mingle with sane people any more. Society must not be endangered by a mad woman, even when she is so great and charming a personage as Lady Mayfair. There—think it all over, and take as many boxes as you like. You are about Madeleine's figure; I daresay you might supply any accidental deficiencies in her wardrobe. Compose yourself, my dear: your nose is quite red. Till to-morrow at ten o'clock then—*au revoir*!'

When he had gone, Lady Mayfair slid down to the floor, and lay on her face, with her white fingers clutching the soft rug. She did not weep; she did not think; but lay like one who waits for death, and cares not.

After a long while, she got slowly to her feet, and stood dizzily, swaying from side to side. There came a knock at the door, but she did not hear it until it had been twice repeated. She leaned with her hand upon the table, and said, 'Come in!'

'Lord Castlemere, my lady,' said the servant, opening the door. 'Shall I say your leddysh'p's out?' he added, after a dismayed glance at her face.

'Tell him to come to me,' she replied, lifting her head defiantly.

CHAPTER XLII.

Lady Mayfair and Lord Castlemere play a game at cross-purposes, preceded by music; and afterwards, her ladyship writes a note.

SELDOM in her life had Lady Mayfair presented so striking an appearance as she offered to Lord Castlemere's eyes, when he entered the room. The emotion which had just passed over her like a thunderstorm had not impaired her beauty, but had given to it a wild and pathetic character which rendered it more than usually attractive. The absence of all conscious graces had imparted a strange charm to the native loveliness of her aspect. She stood her naked self, as it were, simple and defenceless, and therefore appealing more irresistibly than at any other time to sympathy and admiration. Her luxuriant hair had partly fallen on her shoulders; her rich dress was disordered; her eyes burned with a singular brilliance; one of her cheeks was flushed, the other pale. She bent upon Castlemere a gaze at once wandering and concentrated, as if she more per-

ceived his spiritual than his bodily presence. No smile moved her lips; but her countenance and attitude gave out a forlorn and passionate aroma of welcome, as one welcomes help and humanity in extremest need.

'I did not know what I wanted—till now!' she said uncertainly. 'But now—you are here!'

Lord Castlemere contemplated her attentively, and nodded his head, but said nothing. He was carelessly dressed, and looked as if he had been up all night; his face was unshaven, and his hair, which had again begun to grow longer than was fashionable, clustered disorderly about his head. Weariness was apparent in the carriage of his tall, athletic figure; but it seemed the fatigue of mind and sensation rather than of bone and muscle. His eyes were no less clear than usual, but there was a gravity in their expression that almost amounted to sullenness. He carried under his left arm his banjo, sheathed in a covering of fringed and embroidered buckskin. He gave his right hand to Lady Mayfair, and after holding hers for a moment, he relinquished it, and touched her dishevelled hair, causing it to fall to its full length. The touch seemed to her a caress, and she drew a deeper breath, and looked up at him appealingly. But he presently drew back, seated himself in the chair which Bryan had lately occupied, and began to untie the strings of the buckskin cover. Lady Mayfair still remained standing where he had left her.

'The only place in London where I like to be, is here!' observed Lord Castlemere, these being the first words he had spoken.

'Why have you not come more often? I wanted you,' said Lady Mayfair.

'There is no peace anywhere but here,' continued his lordship. 'There is noise everywhere, and people come about me; I forget whether I am myself. Being rich, and a noble, hinders a man, not helps him. I used to think nobles were like mountain-tops—high up, and alone. But the Queen's nobles are like carrion, towards which all birds of prey fly. But in this room I can think my own thoughts, and be happier even than when I am quite alone.'

'Happier, Lord Castlemere?' said Lady Mayfair softly.

'Yes, for my lonely thoughts are not as happy as they used to be; but being with you gives them a sort of happiness.'

'You bring me the only happiness I shall ever care for,' Lady Mayfair said. She moved to an ottoman, flung back her hair, and sat down.

Meanwhile, Lord Castlemere had extricated his banjo from its covering, and was tuning it. Although the banjo is an instrument little cultivated by educated musicians, and now fallen into ignorant and vulgar hands, it possesses rare and valuable qualities. Its music—as discoursed by one who understands its capacities—is more immediately the expression of the human player than either the guitar or the violin, or than any instrument except the voice itself. The most subtle shade and variety of feeling answer back from the strings

until it almost seems as if they were indeed the strings of the heart, tuned to harmony by the emotions. The melody changes colour with the mood, and the same air seems, at different times, as different as the same landscape in sunshine and in storm. There is, moreover, a homely and primitive simplicity in the aspect and organisation of the banjo, in accord with the quaint and sweet purity of the sounds it utters, bringing the listener into as close contact with the archaic source of music's elements as does the warble of a bird—enriched, however, by the human balance of part with part, which the bird cannot give. Sometimes, too, the note is as low as the echo of a thought; and again it rings out and fills the ear, and gratifies the wish that it inspires. Pan with his pipes is a delicious picture; but had his deityship bethought himself to invent the banjo, his picturesqueness would have been none the less, and he might have produced even sweeter harmonies, especially if, as is probable, he could sing as well as play.

As for Lord Castlemere, he knew his banjo as well as (and, possibly, much better than) he knew himself; and he not only could express what he pleased with it, but a large part of his nature would have lacked a means of expression had the banjo been eliminated. It was a delight to hear him play it, and another delight to see him do so; for the banjo, more than any other instrument, admits of skilful and graceful movements of the hands and arm. It was a marvel to behold this young man sweep and modulate the strings with swift and seemingly heedless passes, which, nevertheless, were as sure as they were easy, and made him appear not so much to play as to incite the banjo to sympathetic utterance. His voice, moreover, was singularly melodious and true, and capable of conveying finer and more touching impressions than merely musical ones. The songs he sang were, for the most part, of an original and peculiar character, wild, mirthful, or pathetic, according to the singer's humour of the moment; sometimes they were not so much songs as chants, or simple rhythmical echoes of the voices of nature, such as the sweep and sough of the wind across the grass of the prairie and among the narrow passes of the rocks; the ghostly bark and whine of the remote coyote; the liquid babbling and tinkling fall of brooks; the chorus of birds and insects in the hot midsummer woods. His communion with the banjo, recalling, as it did, all that was sweetest in his Indian life, and importing its harmony and beauty into the irksomeness of the present, must have been an invaluable resource and consolation for the young baron; and, unlike some selfish consolations, it had the advantage of being almost as agreeable to other persons as it was to him.

On this occasion it was evident that music had become a pressing necessity for him, insomuch that, if he had not come here for the sole and express purpose of indulging in it, it was at all events an indispensable preliminary of whatever else he had come to do. Lady Mayfair, also, had been wrought into a state of mind and body that.

music only—and, perhaps, only this musician—could soothe; and, as she half reclined on the cushions of her ottoman, she thanked Providence for having sent her such timely and congenial succour.

At length the player laid down his instrument, passed his hand over his forehead, and became once more aware of his surroundings. He seemed refreshed and quieted; and the pulses of his beautiful companion likewise beat more equably, and the threatenings of social disaster wore no longer so terrible an aspect to her imagination as before. A part of Lady Mayfair had suffered death at Bryan's hands, or was soon to do so; but not the essential part, nor the worthiest. What remained was becoming conscious of the stirrings of a fresher and purer life than she had known since her girlhood, when all the world was before her, and all its evil was unknown. Her eyes rested upon Lord Castlemere, and she thought of their first argument on the merits of civilisation and society. She remembered all they had said. . . . . He had been more right than she: the mode of existence she had so plausibly advocated—was it not, after all, little better than a struggle, a jealousy, a slavery, with the sword of Damocles ever poised overhead? Brilliant, conspicuous, triumphant though her career had been, was any inducement sufficient to encourage her to endure the like again? No; even were the possibility of something infinitely dearer not within her reach. She would never return to those arid and glittering deserts. Better the Valley of Humiliation, or even of the Shadow of Death, than that.

By a slight movement of her hand, supplemented more unmistakably by her eyes, she signed to the young man to come and sit beside her.

'Your music is like yourself,' she said languidly and tenderly; 'there is nothing else like it in the world. I wish there were to be no time when I might not hear it.'

'I am going to leave London soon,' he replied.

'I am not London—not any longer,' she said with a smile. 'I am going to leave it too.'

'It always seemed to me that either you did not belong here, or London did not. When I'm away, I shall be glad to think that you are not here. I have seen all the rest of it, and I hate it.'

'You don't hate me, then?'

He looked at her.

'You're the most beautiful woman in the world,' said he.

Lady Mayfair's bosom heaved gently. She had received as splendid compliments before, but none had ever reached her heart till now.

'I would not be content to be less than the most beautiful, for him!' she thought. 'Why are you going away?' she asked aloud.

'Because I can never be like the others. I've tried; but perhaps I began too late. They and I don't understand one another; I can't do their work, nor they mine; and we do not like each other's plea-

sures. I don't know how to do good with my money, and there seems nothing else to do except harm. There is nothing of my father in me, except the thing that made me want to see some other world than the one I was born in. I am not entirely anything. I cannot see why I was born.'

'Perhaps you were born to make others happy?'

'I've done the opposite of that, so far.'

'If the woman you called the most beautiful in the world has any happiness, it is of your giving.'

'Music is not happiness; it only makes us remember and wish for it.'

'I don't mean your music; I mean you.'

He shook his head.

'What do you mean to do away from here?' resumed she after a pause.

'To study my art, and to educate my daughter to be what I could not.'

'Is she like—her mother?'

'I hope she will be.'

'You loved her mother, then?'

'The man I was at that time, loved her. I have lost the power to love such a woman now.'

'But you have not lost the power of loving?'

'I love my daughter.'

'I should like to love her, too.'

'And my art—I love that.'

'Yes,' said Lady Mayfair. She had been sitting with her hands folded on her knee, her face turned towards Lord Castlemere, but looking a little away from him. Her tone and manner had been marked by a certain anxiety and restlessness, and, occasionally, by a shadow of misgiving or perplexity. Simple and straightforward though the young baron was, the woman of the world could not fathom him; she could not discover what was in his mind, much less in his heart. Was it that she did not know how to question him, or that he knew not how to answer? At all events, they had not yet felt each other. She had told him a dozen times that day, by look, by tone, by inference, almost by the very words, that she loved him; but he had neither responded, nor showed that he understood. He had told her she was the most beautiful of women; he had touched her hair; he had said that only her presence could render London tolerable to him; he had admitted having outgrown the love of his youth; and yet he had not said that he loved Lady Mayfair. Did he love her? What was the meaning of this mysterious reserve? Did it arise from ignorance, or timidity, or insensibility? There was no sign of these defects in his bearing, or in the glance of his eyes. He was at all points a man, and one capable of the most vivid passion. Was she, then, not lovable as well as beautiful?

The strain and torture which Lady Mayfair's spirit had lately

undergone had rendered her, for the time being, as sensitive as a child; and the music, and the presence of the man she loved, had still more poignantly wrought upon her feelings. The world in which she had heretofore existed had been taken from her; there was nothing left to her except this man; were he to fail her, what would happen? The reflection wrung her heart with a sense of exquisite forlornness and desolation; and all at once the tears overflowed in her eyes; she bent over and hid her face in the cushions, and sobbed helplessly and without restraint.

Lord Castlemere's experience had not trained him to witness such a sight unmoved; but neither had it taught him the proper and prudent course of action in circumstances of such delicacy. An ordinary man of the world might, indeed, have improved the opportunity easily enough; but Castlemere had not as yet received those finishing touches of civilisation which might have enabled him to adopt a purely selfish and cynical view of the situation. He took many things seriously, and some things sacredly. On the other hand he was still, in great measure, a creature of impulse.

He knelt down by Lady Mayfair, took one of the hands with which she was hiding her face, and pressed it strongly between his own. He was thinking at the moment of how his little daughter, Manita, sometimes wept, and how he was wont to soothe and comfort her. He kissed Lady Mayfair's hand; then he bent lower and kissed her cheek. A slight shiver passed through her; she turned her face towards him; their lips met.

It was not the kind of kiss that he was wont to give Manita. When he raised his face, it felt burning hot. Fire seemed to be in his thoughts, but they were confused, and as if they belonged to another than himself. He murmured some half-formed words, and gazed at the beautiful woman with a sort of fierce intensity. As she looked up at him, her eyes were wet with tears, and her lips were slightly parted with the promise of a smile, that a deeper emotion held in abeyance. The dawn of that delicious happiness that comes to a passionately loving woman who believes herself beloved gave a tender illumination to her aspect. She looked at that moment like a girl whose first dream of love has just come true. But his expression was perplexed, troubled, almost threatening.

She stretched forth her hand and touched his cheek and his hair.

'How splendid you are! How happy I am!' she said, scarce audibly; 'and, oh! I was so miserable a little while ago!'

Lord Castlemere heaved a short, heavy sigh, passed a hand across his eyes, and looked down.

'Do not be sad, my lord—my love!' she continued. 'You are more to me than a hundred Londons. Don't fear that you can take me from anything I would not gladly leave. I am no longer a woman of fashion, a leader of society; I am yours; my only wish and happiness is to be with you and love you always. Can you love me so much?'

'Love you!' he repeated, not looking at her.

'Yes, your kiss told me that you love me,' she said, leaning nearer to him and encircling his arm with hers. 'But I have had so little love. I can hardly believe it—that it will be for ever.'

'You—for ever?' he said, turning, and eying her strangely. 'What has happened? Is this love?'

'I am your love; I am Alexandra!' she answered playfully. 'Don't you know me?'

'Something is wrong!' said he, drawing away from her.

'What wrong!' she demanded falteringly, for the first time taking alarm.

'It was like love; but there is more in love than a kiss.'

'But a kiss is the beginning.'

'Something is wrong!' he repeated; and added, after a pause, 'I hate myself for feeling what I felt towards you.'

Lady Mayfair recoiled, gazing at him with a shrinking, terrified look, as if he had struck her, and she feared a second blow.

'We had no right to do it,' he continued. 'We have created something monstrous—the body of love without the soul. It is not alive: it is dead—and horrible! The soul should come first; but it can never come from you. We do not belong together.'

'What do you mean?' she demanded faintly, holding her hand over her heart. 'My love is not dead—it has a soul—it is all of me! It cannot die without taking my life away; and that can only be if you—if you love some one else.'

'Some one else! Who?' said he, raising his head.

'I cannot tell—Madeleine, perhaps!'

She had uttered the name heedlessly, with a sort of recklessness born of the unrestrained mood into which they both had fallen—a mood which, leaving nothing unsaid, must produce irrevocable results for good or evil on their future relations. But the sound of that name seemed to kindle an unexpected light in Castlemere's mind. He rose to his feet with a new energy, and with a gesture as if shaking himself free from some bewildering imprisonment. A range of memories and feelings, extending back to boyhood, and hitherto disconnected and misinterpreted, started at once into coherence and significance.

'Madeleine!' he exclaimed; and flung out his arms, as if to take to his heart the one woman in existence whose spirit and nature mated with his own. For a moment, so vivid were his action and expression, it almost seemed as if she, whom he addressed, must actually be present. The man's spiritual passion, stimulated in sympathy with that of his body, had at first been perplexed, because he could not recognise in Lady Mayfair the true object of his super-sensual devotion. But the mention of Madeleine had presented her before his aroused and groping perceptions in a sudden splendour of imaginative comprehension, and he understood, at once and for ever, that it was her and no other whom he loved. He did not know—and it would have been as nothing to him, at that instant, had he known—that Made-

leine, and the heiress whom he had dispossessed of the estates, were one and the same. All mortal and temporary considerations vanished in the great light of realisation that had burst upon him. She who had been to him heretofore a star, a vision, an ideal, scarcely partaking of the warmth and substance of human nature, now appeared as a living and breathing woman, and as such, not the less, but the more sweet, adorable, inspiring. He felt himself a man, awake, veritable, with a place and a purpose in the world. He loved her. Did she love him? He did not ask himself the question. To love her was happiness enough. To love her was goodness and truth, and nothing resulting from it could be evil. No fears or doubts harassed him. He stood firm, and was content.

'You love her!' a voice said. He looked round in surprise. It was Lady Mayfair who had spoken. He had forgotten her. A long time—years seemed to have passed since she had last addressed him, and he had grown and altered much since then. And what familiar truism was this that she was repeating—what fact as familiar to him as the beating of his own pulses? That he loved Madeleine? He looked down at her with a smile.

'Yes, I love her,' he said heartily. 'What were we talking about? I am going to Paris; at least—I don't know where I shall go. I came to say good-bye.'

'What are you? a man? Are all men devils? You take my heart from me and trample on it! You kill me, and smile at me! No, I will not die, Lord Castlemere! I have some power yet—to injure as well as to be injured! Oh, my heart will break! You made me believe you loved me!'

She flung forth the last words with bitter and passionate vehemence. Was this humiliated, slighted, and half-frenzied woman that same Alexandra the Great who was wont to reign over her innumerable subjects with such illustrious serenity and sparkling grace? Had the worlds which she had conquered turned upon her at last, and brought her so low! And the forlornest part of the tragedy was, that Castlemere was so little able to appreciate it.

'I never thought of loving you, except as something beautiful,' he said, with a touch of unstrained friendliness in his tone that went like ice through Lady Mayfair's burning veins. 'I have dreams or visions sometimes that deceive me and mislead me; but how could a vision make you believe that I loved you—unless,' he added, musingly, 'it made me think that you were Madeleine! Perhaps that was it; something seemed wrong, I remember.'

Lady Mayfair had been standing before him, her head bowed, and her hands hanging clasped. Spasmodic undulations, which she made no attempt to control, and of which she seemed unconscious, went through her at times from head to foot; they somewhat resembled the involuntary tremblings which occasionally precede death from bodily wounds. They gradually ceased, and were succeeded by a cold and stolid calm. A superficial observer might have said that she had re-

covered her self-possession; but there was very little left of her to possess. She now looked at Lord Castlemere with a face haggard, but wholly impassive.

'If you did mistake me for another person, I will be on my guard against your falling into the mistake again,' said she. 'We all have had our visions, good or bad; sometimes they turn out realities, sometimes not. And let me warn you, my lord, that what we take for realities sometimes turn out to be visions. You are going to Paris, I think you said, and came to say good-bye. Well, you have said it very effectively. Good-bye!'

When Lady Mayfair was again alone, she seated herself at her writing-table, and put pen and paper before her. She did not write immediately, however, but remained for an hour with her cheek resting on her hand, apparently absorbed in thought. Nevertheless, no connected thoughts passed through her mind, nor any of a comprehensive character. Though endowed with many brilliant, lovable, and even great qualities, Lady Mayfair was not an heroic personage; she was not a queen royal enough to survive discrowning. Perhaps, too, she lacked the moral support of feeling that the love she had proffered Lord Castlemere was altogether pure and unselfish. Those passages in her past career—well, let them have silence. The brotherhood of sin and the brotherhood of humanity are terribly near being identical.

When Lady Mayfair wrote her letter, day was just verging into night. It was a short letter, and hurriedly written, as if the contents had long been in the writer's mind. She sealed it, and addressed it to Mr. Bryan Sinclair; and having rung for the servant, she ordered him to convey it at once to Mr. Sinclair's club.

CHAPTER XLIII.

In which it is incidentally demonstrated that if Bryan had called on Madeleine before calling on Lady Mayfair, a good deal of trouble would have been avoided.

MR. SINCLAIR, meanwhile, had not been idle. It was still early in the afternoon when he left Lady Mayfair's, and it seems to have occurred to him that he could not better improve his spare time than by making another call. Accordingly, he gave directions to his coachman, and ten minutes latter he was admitted to the presence of Madeleine Vivian.

She was plainly dressed in black, buttoned up to her throat, with a white collar; a bow of crimson ribbon was on her breast, and another in her hair. Her dark braids were compactly arranged, her face clear and pale. She received Bryan quietly, letting her eyes rest upon him frequently and long, with an expression in their depths that sometimes

seemed to be a remote smile, sometimes a penetrating inquiry. Madeleine always gave the impression, even to Bryan, of inaccessible heights and unsounded depths in her character; of being able to withdraw, if she chose, into unattainable regions, whence she could exercise powers beyond the scope of ordinary humanity. It was therefore with a sense of uncertainty—with an obscure perception of unexpended resources on her part—that her most intimate friends approached her: no one could foretell what, if need were, she might not decide or dare to do. Thus she made afraid the timid and fascinated the bold. And, no doubt, she herself had confidence in the reserves of her own strength. Seeing all things imaginatively and dramatically, and conscious of her ability intellectually to reproduce the sentiments and passions of the most diverse characters, it naturally seemed to her that there was scarce any moral or emotional achievement to which she was unequal. But, as a matter of fact, the individual nature and temperament limit in a remarkable degree the practical possibilities of action and suffering; and it is the dangerous peculiarity of this truth, that only actual experience can prove it true.

Although Bryan's interview with Lady Mayfair had not, apparently, had quite the issue that he would have desired, it was his cue to assume a confident and optimistic tone. Perhaps he believed that reflection would have the effect of modifying her ladyship's scruples; and, in any case, nothing would be lost by taking the best for granted, until the other thing happened. He consequently comported himself towards Madeleine with gaiety and ease.

'My dear girl,' he said, after they had chatted for a few minutes, 'I have been racking my poor brains about what you had better do. It is a serious question, and a pressing one. If you're going to do anything, the sooner you set about it the better. Sticking in this hole won't do you no good. You must change the air, morally and physically

'You mean that you want me to go to Paris,' said Madeleine, who was standing in her favourite position before the mantelpiece, with one arm resting upon it.

'That will be the best place for you, in my humble opinion, and for a good many excellent reasons.'

'What are they?' she asked, looking at the rings upon her hand.

'In the first place, the best dramatic traditions are there. The audiences know what acting is, and they will stimulate you and prune you; and, what is more, they'll appreciate you. You will need all that at your first beginning.'

'Yes, I shall need that.'

'Well, then, you've got a rival; you've got Rachel. The Parisians know Rachel, and they are jealous of her. But when they are cured of their jealousy, they'll love you all the better for it; and the one and only way of curing them is to beat Madame Rachel on her own ground. That is what you have got to do, my dear; and I believe you can do it. It must be that or nothing, mind you! Either the first place, or no place at all!'

'Yes,' said Madeleine, gazing at him profoundly, and moving her head slowly in assent.

'Rachel, you know, is tremendous in certain directions: in her own special line no one can ever do more than equal her; but then her line is a narrow one. You've got breadth, and tenderness, and humour, and education; you can assume ten characters to Rachel's one; and you've had more technical training already, thanks to your energy and obstinacy, than most actresses have had when they retire. In short, my dear, you can play Shakespeare as he ought to be played. Rachel can only scare and astound her audiences; you can fascinate and charm them as well; and the fact that you are somewhat of her complexion and figure will only make your superior beauty more conspicuous.'

'She has splendid eyes,' remarked Madeleine, dropping the lids of her own.

'Piercing; but yours can melt as well as pierce,' returned Bryan, nodding his head.

'Are there any other reasons?' she inquired.

'Yes; and the best of all! You'll have freedom—liberty to be yourself, and to do what you please! There, you'll be known only for what you prove yourself to be; here, you have your name and your connections for a millstone round your neck. You can appear there under a stage name, and when you've made your reputation, it will become as much your own as your real one—or more so. Then you can come back and conquer London, and they'll be so absorbed in what you are, that they'll never stop to ask who you were.'

'I shall appear as Mademoiselle Madeleine,' said she, quietly.

'*Convenu!* That will be ambiguous enough, at any rate. And now, as I said before, the sooner you do appear, the better.'

'I think so too,' said Madeleine.

Bryan paused. Madeleine's demeanour puzzled him a little. She was unusually quiet and cool; there was something almost ironical in the sober manner in which she listened to him, agreed with him, and—waited for him. What was she waiting for? The moment had come when it was necessary for Bryan to unfold his scheme for getting Madeleine to Paris, and he felt the need of all his powers of diplomacy. If she were to suspect his designs, and refuse, it was difficult to see what means he could use to compel her. Was it possible that she had been forewarned? Not, certainly, by Lady Mayfair; nor was it more likely that Kate Roland had divined his plans. So far, therefore, he was safe; and yet he could not help feeling apprehensive. It is hard to foresee all contingencies, especially, perhaps, when the mind is preoccupied with the consciousness of villainy.

While he hesitated, Madeleine herself took the initiative.

'How am I to go to Paris?' she demanded.

'That's precisely the question I've been asking myself since our last conversation on the subject,' he exclaimed, throwing himself

back in his chair with an air of engaging candour. 'Our decision then was that neither Kate Roland nor your Aunt Maria was available. Well, what was to be done? Somebody must be found, of the female sex, of irreproachable social standing and moral character, friendly disposed towards you, whose presence would be the fullest protection to you, who would be interested in our scheme, and who would not be averse to lending her countenance to a little preliminary mystification.'

'Mystification?'

'Why, to be sure! You don't suppose that a young lady like Miss Madeleine Vivian can suddenly vanish from London, and no questions asked? But if it can be said that she has gone for a trip on the Continent with such and such a well-known lady, suspicion is disarmed; and then if curiosity presume so far as to inquire what she is visiting the Continent for—I take it that a little mystification would be both expedient and excusable.'

'How ingenious you are, Bryan! Who is this lady to be?'

'Well—who do you think?'

'I think that no lady such as you describe would do it.'

'Why not, pray?'

'Is there such a one?'

Bryan nodded his head with a sagacious glance and smile. Madeleine regarded him steadfastly for a while, and then asked abruptly—

'Who is she?'

'No less a person than our friend Alexandra the Great, Lady Mayfair! Simple enough, you see, as soon as it is explained to you; but, like Columbus's egg . . . . the anecdote is something musty! Well, are you satisfied?'

'Lady Mayfair!' repeated Madeleine, with an intonation of surprise and regret. 'I thought she was a friend of mine!'

'So she is—and is that any objection?' cried Bryan.

'Has she agreed to do it?'

'You may rely upon that! and to set out at once.'

'I believed in a good deal of wickedness in this world,' said Madeleine; 'but there seems to be more in it than I believed.'

'Well, now you're beyond me! Have mercy upon my straitened understanding! So, Lady Mayfair, because she consents to leave the delights of London and chaperone you for a couple of months on the Continent, is a phenomenon of wickedness, is she? In that case, what, I should like to know, would a phenomenon of amiability and self-sacrifice be like?'

Madeleine remained silent and inactive for a few moments, gazing straight before her with black unfathomable eyes, and head erect. Then, the first stirrings and omens of an approaching storm, succeeding her unnatural calm, began to manifest themselves. She altered her position, passed her hands swiftly and lightly over the braids of her hair, moved with a lithe, elastic step to another part of

the room, whence she looked round at Bryan with a keen, indignant glance. She stood, alive with subtle, controlled movements and emotion, a splendid and luminous figure, filling the dusky room with her superb presence. Her very silence seemed to speak, and to be unanswerable. But at length, when the atmosphere had become so charged with spiritual electricity that even Bryan began to show signs of uneasiness, she found her utterance.

'Your reasons are very reasonable,' she said, 'but you might as well have kept them back. I care nothing for them. There is one reason you have forgotten; and to forget that is to forget everything. It is to forget yourself, and me!'

'Alas! what ignorant sin have I committed!' exclaimed Bryan, who thought it prudent to avoid seriousness as long as possible.

'An ignorant sin! Yes, so it is! The ignorance of a cold heart and a degraded soul! Do you fancy you can read my heart when yours is dead, or rule my spirit with the brute strength of your voice and muscles? Oh, you have never known me! and I wish to God I could become as blind towards you .... but, though I shut my eyes, I see you through and through! You crawl and wind like a snake, and think I do not know—that I am beguiled and unsuspecting. But I am above you; and when I look down—as I must do to you—I see what is beneath me! What shame and misery it is! Are not you man enough to stand on your feet and face the light? I don't ask you to be good: I gave that up, long since. Do any wickedness you will, but do it like a man! Can you find no better way to destroy a woman like me than to mine the ground beneath my feet, and smother me in a pit? Have I not a heart to stab, or a brain to crush? .... Oh, but what folly, too! How can you conquer me unless you will rise high enough for me to contend with you? Why, is not this laughable? Here am I, a helpless woman, trying to teach a man how to profit by my helplessness! Aim your arrows here!' she exclaimed, clasping her hands over her bosom, 'not into the earth I set my feet upon! Don't be ingenious—be terrible! I am worthy so much deference, at least! You are cold, cold, cold! .... Even Lucifer had fire blazing in him. You have fallen lower than Lucifer: if you are a devil, you are a clownish and stupid one! .... But what am I?' she went on, with a passionate gesture of the arm; 'I love you! yes, I love you! My mind is the slave of my heart, and my heart is yours! If you were more worthy of my love, I should fear to tell you of it; but, being what you are, I scorn to have concealments from you! I throw away my shield—the only shield a loving woman has .... here! Look into my heart, and defile it and ruin it, if you can! If the love that is there is not strong enough to overcome your monstrous selfishness, then there is nothing else in the world strong enough. That is my stake: I will hazard life and everything upon it: if I lose, then all his lost—for both of us. Your only chance of heaven is through me, Bryan: and to give you that chance, I risk the hell that you must else endure! Do you

understand me? Have you understood one word that I have spoken? Oh, you were not always like this! There was in you the making of as noble a man as ever lived upon the earth! Do you remember that day in the field, beneath the hedgerow, when you told me the story of Undine? You were stained and tarnished even then, but you had not forgotten that you once were pure. You taught me that I had a soul: was it only that you might afterwards destroy it? The first love that ever beat in my heart was for you, and it is my shame and my glory that I love you still. Perhaps you laugh that I tell you this, and think it an assurance of your power over me. But to have such power is more perilous for you than for me. When you strike a dastardly stroke against such love as mine . . . . you may kill me, but the love is immortal; it will haunt you after I am gone, and your death will be more terrible than mine, for it will be for ever! And yet . . . . oh, my love, rather than be parted from you, even after we are dead, I would make myself as wicked as you are . . . . only that I have learnt, in you, that wickedness poisons love; so that we should be parted all the more. It is a tragedy of tragedies, my poor boy,' she continued, her voice faltering, and her great eyes softening with tears; 'to give my soul for yours, gladly as I would do it, would not help you; for to give it spoils it of the only saving virtue that it has. I cannot make our happiness, and you will not. There is no chance for us, but in the few blind disgraceful months or years we might pass together here; and to gain that wretched privilege, which beasts enjoy as well as we, you would sacrifice all the rest. Is it worth while, Bryan? Shall I yield to you? What should prevent me from doing what so many have done before, and will do hereafter, as long as women are women and men are men? But if I do, it will be more in despair than in love. When you conquer me, it will not be me that you conquer; but something else, not worth conquering See, even now, what things I bring myself to say!' She flung herself into a chair, placed her arms upon the table, and hid her face on them. When she lifted it again it was weary and listless, as was the voice in which she continued—'If you had known what love was—I don't say if you had loved yourself—you would never have made this blunder, Bryan. It never occurred to you that I must be thinking of you all the time, and imagining what your thoughts and plans would be. Did you suppose I would believe that your real reason for wishing me to go to Paris was any of those you gave? I know your reason; and if you had been bold enough to declare it—I am at such a pass for pleasures now—it would have been a sort of pleasure to me to hear it. But, instead of that, you told me useless falsehoods—like any vulgar hypocrite. But the worst is, that you have forced Lady Mayfair to become your accomplice. Yes—your accomplice! for she is too clever a woman, and she knows you too well, for you to deceive her. It was a clumsy plot, my poor Bryan. Why don't you confess it? Ah, me! what are you afraid of?—of me?' She laughed in a lifeless way. 'Well, at all events, I will not go with Lady Mayfair.'

'You will not go?' said Bryan, bending a gloomy gaze upon her.

'Not with her.'

'Nor with anyone else?'

'No.'

'Not at all, then?'

'Yes, I shall go.'

'How?'

'Alone.'

'Alone—with me?'

'No. I will tell you—and yet, why should I tell you? You tried to entrap me, but you have lost all your labour of contriving and deception. I made up my mind, long ago, to go to France; and to go alone, and secretly. No one but you will know where I am, and you will not dare to meddle with me. Our time will not yet have come. But it will come at last, Bryan,' she added, clasping her hands on the table, and fixing a long, wistful look upon him. 'We shall stand face to face, and know which of us has the victory.'

Bryan sat with his chin upon his breast, and his red brows drawn together, while his muscular hands alternately tightened and relaxed their hold upon the arms of his chair. He had lapsed into one of those sombre moods which occasionally befall men of his temperament, and which of late had visited him more often than in his earlier time. Men of the most unmitigable purpose, when the purpose is also a selfish one, are sometimes fain to pause and ask themselves what it all amounts to. And this question creates a feeling as of being driven by fate into a trap, from which there is no escape, because the trap is the man himself. The strength of which he was proud turns out to be the strength that binds him. The goal at which he aims being himself, all seeming progress towards it is illusory: at the end of years, or of a lifetime, all his efforts will not have improved his position a jot. And when the merely animal spirits are temporarily torpid, and the brain coldly surveys the situation, it can scarcely fail to appear unmercifully dreary.

'You seem to have a clearer notion of what is in store for us than I have, Madey,' he said, after a silence. 'I sometimes think I am nothing more than a sort of puppet of yours, owing all its life and movement to your whim. I seem to do what I please, and even to control you; but that's only my hallucination, just as the earth fancies the sun rises. If you could only explain to me why you love me, I should be less in the dark about other things.'

'It is all dark,' said Madeleine, mournfully, and seeming to heed the sound rather than the meaning of his words. 'Perhaps I may find I love some one else, when it's too late.'

'There's only one man I should be afraid of,' Bryan remarked; 'and it's not likely, as things look now, that you will meet with him. I don't mean poor Stanhope Maurice, nor anybody you ever heard of. Well, when do you propose to set out for Paris?'

'To-morrow.'

'Then, if I'd happened not to come here to-day I should not have found you?'

'I should have sent you word.'

'Why not have given me the slip, as well as the rest of 'em—much more, indeed!'

'I wish to be hidden from the others; they would interfere with me. But you must be near me—within my reach.'

'Upon my word, you are putting things in a new light! Then your only apprehension about me is, that you may lose sight of me!'

'You are the one great sin that I have committed, Bryan; and I can no more be parted from you than any other sinner can separate himself from his transgression.'

'Well done, Madey! But doesn't the Bible tell the sinner to turn from his wickedness and live?'

She shook her head.

'My heart and soul are guilty of you. Your mark is on them. I cannot turn from my wickedness and live. But if my wickedness would be transformed, and become a virtue—that would be life for both of us!'

'Ah! there you are again. There's no virtue in me, Madey, nor the making of any. I'll give you a comparison, since you're so fond of 'em. The same sunlight that is turned to fragrance by the flower is perverted to rottenness by the carrion. Can you interpret that parable?'

'But the sun shines for ever; and by-and-by out of the rottenness it will bring forth flowers.'

'Humph! Well, I'm not competent to maintaining so figurative an argument; though it strikes me that that deduction of yours seriously menaces my individuality as well as my dignity. It will be no special gratification or credit to me to furnish bone-manure for a crop of saints! However, never mind! Let us be practical for a moment. You are going to slip off to-morrow, as I understand, without saying good-bye to anybody. But what arrangements have you made? Is your luggage ready? Is anything prepared for you on the other side? What security have you against being pursued and brought back? Have you got all the money you need?'

'I have attended to all that,' she answered; 'I have a better head for business than you suppose. I shall travel with my maid; most of my things have already been sent on; and I shall stay with some relatives of my mother, who was an actress, you know. It will not be easy for anyone to find me; and if I were found, it would make no difference: I shall have taken the decisive step, and I am my own mistress.'

'When am I to be permitted to pay my respects to Mademoiselle Madeleine?'

'I will let you know hereafter. Meantime you must stay here, and——'

'And put the others off the scent. Well, that's a job that fits my capacities; and then, my girl, this anomalous half-and-half sort of existence must come to an end. Since that day when I offered you your liberty, and you refused it, I hold us to be man and wife as much as if the Primate of England and all his secondaries had been at work over us. You and I are of a calibre to dispense with the interference of other people in the settlement of our private affairs. Your genius makes you independent of the world; and, for my part, I've been an outlaw from the beginning. We shall have earned our right to freedom—we shall have paid our price for it—and we'll have it! All the world can't keep us apart, and it shall have nothing to do with keeping us together! So no more jeremiads, Madey. Keep your imagination for the stage, and leave the rest to me. Why, another such harangue as that would be enough to make me blow my invaluable brains out. You have such a way of putting things, that it seems—until one has time to think it over—as if nothing else could be true. But, the brains once out, the man will die, in spite of your friend Macbeth's heresy on the subject. Come now, let's kiss and make it up!' He came up to her, and laid his hands on her shoulders. She neither drew back nor bent forwards, but looked him in the eyes.

'Not now, Bryan,' she said. 'A kiss, between us, means too much or too little. Do you know, you have not once to-day told me that you love me. What you have just said means that you love your own way. And you fear the world more than I, if you think its interference, as you call it, can make love less or greater.'

'Why, what's come over you, child? If you knew all I could tell you, you'd say I care more for you now than ever. Be reasonable; our marriage was made in heaven before we were born.'

'I am my own forlorn hope, Bryan. I neither ask nor give quarter till the fight be over. If you hope for anything hereafter, ask nothing now.'.

'What fight, Madey?'

'Mine, against myself perhaps.'

'You'll have a tough time of it!' he exclaimed, with a laugh. But he made no further attempt to move her.

CHAPTER XLIV.

In which Sir Stanhope Maurice is foolhardy,—Bryan Sinclair is unfortunate,—Tom Berne is officious, and Kate Roland is a minute too late.

SIR STANHOPE MAURICE dropped in to see Madeleine the next day, and received the startling information that she had gone and left no address. He consulted Kate Roland, and they agreed that Sinclair was at the bottom of the mystery. 'He has carried her off with him,' was the unuttered thought in both their minds. But the baronet's

subsequent encounter with Bryan at the club left him with the persuasion that the latter was as much in the dark as himself as to Madeleine's whereabouts. Kate, however, judging of the matter apart from Bryan's personal influence, was of another opinion. At all events, it was necessary to go after Madeleine at once, and Kate prepared to set out, and Stanhope was ready to accompany her.

At this juncture he received a communication that puzzled him. A letter reached him through the post-office, containing the following words: 'Sir, I know where she is. Trust nobody, but come alone to Hyde Park Corner at six to-morrow evening, and you shall hear.—An old acquaintance.' There was nothing in the appearance or handwriting of this letter to indicate its source. Sir Stanhope finally decided to keep the appointment, but he said nothing to Kate about it, lest she should try to dissuade him.

Before following him further, we must return to Lord Castlemere. After leaving Lady Mayfair, he went home and prepared for a journey. He dressed himself in a costume more suited to San Francisco than to Piccadilly, slung his banjo over his shoulder, took Manita by the hand, and set forth.

'Where are we going, papa?' asked the child.

'Where nobody knows us.'

'Why?'

'So we may not get lost, Manita.'

'Shall we come back again?'

'Ask no more questions.'

They travelled by coach. The day was cold and drizzly, and there was little light. The motion of the vehicle soon rocked Manita asleep; she curled up her little feet, rested her head under her father's arm, and closed her large bright eyes. Jack, for his part, presently fell into a reverie. A world of ideas—a spiritual world—was never far from him. His wanderings in this super-sensual region had a certain reality of their own, and at times, when his visions took bodily as well as mental possession of him, he would awake to find himself in some strange place or situation, without any recollection how he came there. An interior sight was opened in him, causing him, perhaps, to put upon material objects other than a material interpretation—as when one sees men as trees, walking. On this occasion his reverie was of a pleasing character. He was journeying away from some stifling City of Destruction, in which he had been bemazed. His heart beat stronger, his chest heaved, a freer air touched his forehead. To enjoy liberty, one must have been bound neck and heels for a year or two. Wealth and rank were the two jailers who had been keeping guard over poor Jack; but he had given them the slip, and saved his soul alive. The imprisonment, real though it had seemed while he was its victim, was now all the fabric of a dream—a delusion, a negation. All oppression seems so, when it is past. Slavery must last a long time to become a man's second nature.

Liberty, sculpture, music—these were the good fairies whose

gracious splendour brightened the horizon and shone along the way, betraying the unreality of mud and clouds. Another phantom there was, appearing only at intervals; but Jack knew her well: she had been, since his boyhood, an inspiration and a hope. He had spoken with her face to face, had touched her hand; at every culminating epoch of his life it was natural that she should appear, either to warn or to encourage him. Yesterday he had felt that he loved her; but they had never spoken of love; and how can a man love a vision? But Jack was sensible of a strange, sweet trouble of the heart—a languorous emotion, a magnetised beating of the pulses, when this vision presented itself. There she was, again! Had not her eyes encountered his before the veil was drawn? Was the veil also a dream?

Somewhat disturbed, he aroused himself, and saw that they were just leaving the dusky main street of a small town where they had changed horses. Manita still slept at his side; in the west was a gleam of dim brightness. The rain had ceased, and a faint breeze came cool across the damp meadows.

Two hours later, Jack was leaning on the railing of the little steamboat that was to convey him across the Channel. Passengers and cargo were aboard, the last hawser had been cast loose, and the paddle-wheels began to revolve. The black pier, with its confused crowd, its flaring lights, its wet sides lapped by the waves, grew distant and indistinct. The salt wind came to Jack's nostrils and warmed his blood. Overhead, the dark hollow of the sky sparkled with stars. As they gained the offing, the boat plunged and rose across the gulf and ridges of the waves. Jack was alone, save for the man at the helm, the look-out forward, and the officer with his cigar on the bridge.

By-and-by a figure came up the companion-way and advanced towards him. The figure was scarcely defined in the darkness, but Jack perceived that it was a woman. She probably supposed him to be one of the crew; she did not notice him, but stood near him with her hands on the railing, gazing off to leeward. In this position her face, with dark eyes and oval outlines, was revealed. She gave a long sigh, and partly turned towards him.

'It is really you,' he said.

She gazed at him fixedly several moments. 'Are you alone?' she asked.

'Manita and I.'

'Is Manita the little girl?'

'My daughter. Are you coming with us?'

'I am alone.'

'You carry happiness with you,' said he, after a pause.

'That is a strange thing for me to hear!'

'You have greater things to do than to live for me; but I live for you.'

'How can I be anything to you?'

'It was for you I left London. The thought of you shall make me good; and I shall try to make Manita like you.'

'You must hate her, then!'

Jack was silent. Their eyes met. 'I love you!' he said.

She started, and half closed her eyes. With her right hand she made a quick waving gesture before her face. 'Love disaster and wickedness rather! Will you do me a service?'

'Any in the world!'

'Throw me into the sea!' She stepped close to him as she spoke, and stood with raised arms, as if waiting for him to cast her overboard. But presently her arms dropped to her sides, and she laughed hysterically.

'So we do on the stage,' she said. 'One night leap into the arms of death; the next, smile in the arms of a lover; and the love and the death are both make-believe. You love me, do you? Well, it might have been. You knew me first; and you seem a man to be loved. Is it fate, or my own will? We are fortune's fools, all of us!'

'Can I defend you from anything?' he asked, heeding her tone and not her words.

'Defend me against my love!' she said, with a smile of irony. 'Defend me against myself! I love danger, despair, and evil, and I am become what I love. Defend me by making me love you! Ha, ha, ha! I am only acting. The world is too small—no room for more than one man and woman in it at a time! You are not the man. But you think me an angel, I suppose? Well, angels vanish, and so will I!'

Jack put forth his hand and grasped her arm, as she was turning away. 'I feel that you are a woman,' said he. 'We were made for each other.'

'For each other's misery, then,' she replied. 'Let me go.'

'We shall know each other,' said he, relinquishing his hold slowly. 'The time will come.'

'It would be a sorry time,' was her rejoinder. 'Love and knowledge are bad company.' She drew back into the gloom, and, in another moment, had disappeared. Jack was once more alone with the waves and the stars. As he leaned over the side, the pale spectre of a ship, with all sails set, glided silently past at a little distance. She bore a light on her foremast, and another over her stern. A shout came from her, faint against the breeze as an infant's murmur. Jack strained his ears to listen, but the sound was not repeated; and as the ship veered upon another tack, the shadow crept over her hollow sails, and she vanished as if swallowed up in the sea.

About seven o'clock in the evening, as Kate Roland was sitting solitary before her fire, with her arms folded and her eyes fixed on the coals, Stanhope Maurice was announced, and came hastily in.

'Oh, Stanhope, I'm so glad you've come!' she exclaimed, rising eagerly and giving him her hand. 'Have you any news? I do so want to be up and doing!'

Stanhope looked grave, and laid aside his hat and overcoat before making any reply. 'I have some news,' he then said, seating himself, 'though of what value remains to be proved. Whom do you suppose I have just parted from?'

'Not Bryan? Who then?'

'Of all men in the world, my old foreman, Tom Berne—you know he has been Bryan's servant for some years back, and has been going rather to the bad, I fancy. However, he seems to have some conscience after all. Bryan is as great a scoundrel as we suspected.'

'If Tom Berne has convinced you of that, I thank him, for one!' said Kate, nodding her head, with a side glance. 'He turned State's evidence, did he?'

'He wrote me a note, anonymously, in consequence of which I met him at the place he named. The story he told sounds terribly plausible. He says Bryan persuaded Madeleine to go to Paris; but in order to avert suspicion she was to start a day or two before him, he meanwhile to remain here and put her friends on a wrong scent—insinuate that she has gone to America, or something of that sort. That corresponds with what he has actually done, you see. Before long, Tom says, Bryan will leave London, to join her in Paris. We must not lose sight of him.'

'Can't we get to her before he does?'

'Tom thinks it would be impossible, as we have no clue to her hiding-place. When Tom has found out, through Bryan, where she is, he will guide us there. I have appointed a meeting-place with him in Paris.'

'Did you give him any money, or did he ask for any?' demanded Kate, after a little reflection.

'I offered him some, but he refused it.'

'Seems rather odd, doesn't it? What reason did he give for telling you this?'

'He said, "It was at his, Bryan's orders, sir, that I shot and killed my brother Hugh, in America. And I swore I'd be revenged for it."'

'Can that be true?'

'I don't see what object the man can have in volunteering a falsehood. But he told me a great many other things that I wish I could believe were false.'

'About Bryan?'

'Yes. The amount of it is, that Bryan has committed crimes enough to hang him half a dozen times over. In most of them he has made Tom his accomplice, or cat's-paw, and so bound him to secrecy. He seems to have made a slave of the poor wretch, body and soul. A few months ago, Bryan took out a heavy insurance on one of the great East Indiamen, and had her scuttled, or blown up at sea. There are a number of other cases nearly or quite as bad, but here,' continued Stanhope, taking a bundle of papers from his pocket, 'are some documents that prove that he was concerned in that great

bank forgery that occurred several weeks back, and which has remained a mystery. These will be enough for our purpose.'

'Will they be sufficient to convict him?'

'Probably; but I can put them to a better use than that. By letting Bryan know I have them, I can force him to give up his designs against Madeleine, and take himself permanently out of the way.'

'Why not have him arrested at once?'

'You know Madeleine's temper; if we forcibly prevented him from joining her, she might cling to him out of mere defiance; but if he ran away from her to save his skin, she would be disgusted and give him up.'

'He is too dangerous a man to try experiments with.'

'He is sure to get caught sooner or later; and meanwhile we had better make what use we can of him.'

'Well, it may be so,' said Kate, after a pause. 'But, do you know, I feel misgivings about the whole thing. Tom's conduct seems very strange, however you look at it. If he could muster up courage enough to apply to you, why didn't he apply to the police? How can we be certain that Madeleine has not gone to America, after all?'

'Nothing is absolutely certain until it is proved, of course,' Stanhope admitted; 'but if you had heard Tom yourself, I think you would have inclined to believe him. At all events, the affair is at such a pass now, that we can't afford to let any chance slip. We must do the best we can with the information we have, and trust to the turn of the moment, for the rest.'

'Poor Madey!' said Kate, tears coming to her eyes. 'What a fate, to be entangled with that man!'

'It is horrible in every way,' returned Stanhope. 'Bryan has been my dearest and most intimate friend; there never was a man with finer or stronger capacities; I would have done anything for him; and here I am, picked out by destiny to hunt him down and prove him a criminal and a villain! I would rather be dead myself!'

The honourable little baronet's voice wavered and grew husky. Human philosophy finds it difficult to appreciate the Divine justice of the triumph of evil over good in mortal life.

'You will live to save Madeleine,' said Kate, with an assurance in her tone which she did not, perhaps, altogether feel.

After some further conversation, they separated, having arranged their plans on the basis of information afforded by Tom Berne.

They arrived in Paris a few days later, and Stanhope lost no time in presenting himself at the appointed rendezvous. Tom, however, failed to appear. The place was near the southern outskirts of the city, at a cabaret in the corner of a narrow street which lay between blank walls for the distance of a hundred yards or so, and then, taking a bend, ended in an open waste place, half an acre in area, littered with heaps of rubbish, and hollowed out at one spot into an irregular pit of some depth.

After sitting for about half an hour in the cabaret, sipping a glass of sour wine, Sir Stanhope stepped outside, and paced slowly along the narrow lane, until he reached the open place. It was already dark, and there were no lights; but, as the baronet stood there, he fancied he discerned the movement of a figure among the heaps of rubbish beyond. He concentrated his gaze upon it, but could no longer make out anything; either the figure had vanished, or his senses had misled him. He returned to the cabaret, and as there continued to be no signs of Tom Berne, he finally gave up expecting him for that evening, and betook himself to the hotel, where Kate was awaiting his report.

'No news,' he said, on entering; 'and I begin to fear you may have been right—that they are not in Paris after all.'

'I was wrong, my dear,' returned Kate. 'I saw her this evening.'

The baronet jumped up from the chair in which he had just before wearily seated himself. But to his eager look Kate responded with a shake of the head.

'It was only a glimpse,' said she; 'I was at the window, and saw her cross the street. I pulled open the window and called out to her; she glanced round, and she must have seen me; but she only hastened to get out of the way, poor child. I put on my hat and went after her as quickly as possible, but it was no use; I couldn't find her.'

Sir Stanhope sighed heavily, and reseated himself.

'If any harm has come to her, I don't want to live,' he exclaimed sullenly. 'And now that she knows you are here, it will be all the harder to find her. If I can only meet Sinclair!'

'I hope, at least, you will have some police-officers within reach when you do meet him. You are running a great risk, going to him alone in this way.'

'Sinclair can do nothing to me unless he murders me, and he won't do that. And as for the police, they would spoil the only chance there is of helping Madeleine.'

And from this position the baronet refused to be dislodged.

The greater part of the next day he passed in his room, pacing up and down in his Napoleonic style, and writing letters. He was thoughtful and taciturn, but not so much depressed as formerly. It was a bright and sunny day, and he could see from his window crowds of Parisians strolling about and enjoying themselves. The violent and tragic scenes through which the city had passed, and which were still in store for it, cast no retrospective or prophetic shadow over the cheerful present. Tragedy, in its effect upon the general welfare and temper of mankind, is among the least real and permanent of mortal incidents. The murdered are dead; the murderers vanish; the world contrives to draw an indirect advantage from the catastrophe, and forgets it. The race moves onward blindly and instinctively towards a still receding horizon, where tragedy shall no more exist. The elements of health are gathered up and kept; those of feebleness and

failure are left behind. Like shadows they possess no reality, although, as we are at present constituted, they are the evidence of it.

Sir Stanhope dined with Kate Roland, and the conversation, by a tacit agreement perhaps, avoided the topic which must be supposed to have mainly occupied their minds, and touched upon lighter matters. The baronet spoke of his mother, who had latterly suffered from a partial loss of memory, and appeared to be sinking into a gradual decline; of his financial affairs, which, he thought, were about to enter on a more hopeful phase; of various events of his own life, which he now seemed to look upon in a different and wiser light than heretofore; of Australia, and the possibility of his attempting to begin a new career in the new world.

Kate listened with a feeling of sadness, though she made a point of answering him cheerfully. She looked forward to the immediate future with no little anxiety, and had made up her mind to take certain measures which she would not at present reveal to her friend.

Dinner being over, Stanhope prepared to go forth.

'I feel certain that I shall see Bryan this time,' he remarked. 'He will know from Madeleine that we are here, and that his purpose is known. You will hear all about it to-night.'

'Be careful; and do not expect too much,' said Kate, as she gave him her hand at parting. 'By the way, where is your place of meeting?'

'It could do no good to tell you,' answered he; 'besides, it was part of my understanding with Berne that nothing be said about it. The risk he runs entitles him to some security.'

Kate said no more, and they separated; but no sooner had he left the house than she put on her pelisse and hat, and followed him.

Stanhope, walking rapidly, had already got out of sight by the time Kate reached the street; but she had watched him the previous day from the window, and knew the general direction he would take; besides which, from some hints he had let fall in conversation from time to time, she had been able to form an approximate idea of his probable destination. She hurried on, therefore, as swiftly as she could, and was glad that the lateness of the hour, and the comparative unfrequentedness of the region through which her course lay, protected her from curious notice. She had arranged no settled plan of action, but she believed Stanhope was in danger, and she was prepared to do what a woman might to help him, if need were.

When Stanhope arrived at the cabaret, he opened the door, and at once saw Bryan seated at a small table, with his back towards him. Tom Berne sat at the opposite side of the table, facing the door. He looked up, and his glance met that of the baronet, but no change was expressed in his features.

Stanhope walked up to the table, laid his hand on Bryan's chair, and said, in a low voice,

'Sinclair!'

Bryan turned about, not in a startled way, but deliberately, and,

upon seeing the other, arose. His face was a good deal altered. He had let his beard grow, and his eyes were concealed beneath a pair of green goggles. A soft felt hat was pulled down over his forehead.

'What the devil do you want?' he demanded, after a moment, in a stern tone, but quietly.

Tom Berne, from the background, made a signal to Stanhope, which the latter understood as an entreaty not to betray him.

'It happens that we have met,' he said. 'I have something to say to you. Shall it be here, or outside?'

Bryan gazed steadily at him for a few seconds, then a peculiar smile parted his lips, which he moistened with the tip of his pointed tongue. He turned round brusquely, walked up to the desk, and paid his reckoning, came back to Stanhope, and taking him by the arm, exclaimed, '*Allons donc, camarade, dépêchons-nous!*' and drew him out of the cabaret, Tom Berne following close behind. They walked slowly down the narrow lane towards the waste place.

Stanhope spoke rapidly, and with excitement; Bryan listened, and occasionally gave a low laugh. Arrived at the end of the lane, they halted, and the two men faced each other. Tom withdrew into the shadow of the wall, close to Bryan.

'Well, come to the point,' said Bryan. 'What are you going to do?'

'Your liberty, if not your life, is at my mercy,' said Stanhope. 'If you remain in this city twelve hours longer, or attempt to see her again, I'll have you arrested.'

'The deuce you will! What—an old friend like me!'

'I mean what I say.'

'Bless my heart!' said Bryan, still in a bantering way. 'A champion, *sans peur et sans reproche*. Well, my dear boy, if you are determined toproceed to extremities, I won't balk you. Stay with me to-night, and to-morrow morning, as long before sunrise as you like, we will betake ourselves to some secluded spot, and have it out together with whatever weapons you may select, from squirt-guns to flying artillery. Will that satisfy you?'

'I will not honour such a scoundrel as you by fighting you,' said the baronet, loudly. 'If you attempt to evade me, I'll denounce you this moment as a thief and a murderer! I have the proofs. The police are not far off.'

'Tut, tut! keep your tongue behind your teeth, my fine fellow!' said Bryan, stepping closer to him, with a terrible look. At this juncture, Tom approached his master, and whispered something in his ear. Bryan glanced down the lane, and then laid his hand on Stanhope's shoulder. 'You have the proofs, eh?' he said. 'Where are they?'

'Hands off, you villain!' shouted the other, wrenching himself loose. 'Touch me at your peril.'

'Don't be a fool, Stan,' said Bryan, speaking in a deep voice close to the baronet's face. 'I don't want to hurt you. Come, be sensible.'

'Stand off!' cried Stanhope; and drawing back, he aimed a blow at the red-haired Hercules.

The latter brushed the blow aside, and by a sudden movement passed his arm round his antagonist's neck, and clapped his hand over his mouth. The two struggled together for a few moments, until Stanhope succeeded in partly freeing his head, and uttered a loud cry. Just then Tom again approached, and slipped some object into Bryan's left hand. Bryan's fingers closed upon it mechanically; perhaps, in the preoccupation of the contest, he scarcely realised what it was. Stanhope, meanwhile, continued to make desperate efforts to break loose; they whirled into the open place, and stumbling over one of the heaps of rubbish, came headlong to the ground, Stanhope undermost. As he fell, he uttered a deep groan. Bryan rose to his feet, but the baronet lay still.

'What's the matter with him?' said Bryan, after a moment.

''A won't shout any more!' returned Tom, gazing down at the fallen man, with an odd chuckle in his throat. 'Yo' gev' it 'im sound—thro' the heart!'

Bryan stooped down, and passed his hand over the other's breast; apparently he touched something which caused him to start erect again; for several seconds he seemed unable to act or speak. At length he said, in a gloomy, monotonous tone, 'It's sticking upright in him. Damn you, Tom Berne, this is your doing again! What did you give me the cursed thing for?'

'Here they come, master,' said Tom, pointing down the lane, where several figures appeared hurrying along beneath the lamp at the corner of the cabaret. 'Best be off! 'A'll do for 'em!'

Bryan looked, hesitated, and retreated, leaping over the heaps of rubbish, and speedily vanishing in the darkness. Tom, before leaving the ground, felt in the fallen man's pockets, and drew forth some papers, which he transferred to his own. But by the time Kate Roland, with the proprietor of the cabaret, and a gendarme, reached the spot, nothing remained there but the dead body of Sir Stanhope Maurice, stretched out on its back, with a knife in its heart. The innkeeper was voluble with exclamations and protestations; the officer was grim and laconic; and Kate dropped on her knees, with clasped hands, and grief and bitterness in her soul.

CHAPTER XLV.

'They who do ill, yet feel no preference for it,
Do it in base and tasteless ignorance.'

About two hours later, Kate Roland returned, exhausted and sick at heart, to her hotel. The inquest upon Sir Stanhope's body would be held on the following day. There was no doubt in

Kate's mind as to who had done the murder, but she had already reflected that the technical evidence necessary to secure arrest and conviction might be difficult to obtain; and even supposing that obstacle overcome, it would probably prove next to impossible to lay hands upon the guilty man. It would be easy for Bryan to leave Paris, and find an asylum in Belgium or elsewhere; no doubt he was already on his way. The murder, she argued, must have been premeditated, and, consequently, the means of eluding capture likewise. There was but one redeeming feature discernible in this gloom of disaster, and that was that it must put an end to all relations between Bryan and Madeleine. The latter's infatuation must vanish for ever in the face of such a crime as this. Nothing that her friends could have devised to separate her from Bryan could have achieved that end so infallibly as this deed of Bryan himself. For that end, Stanhope would have deemed his own death not too high a price to pay; and as for the retribution on the murderer, would not that come when and in what manner Providence saw fit? Kate had known too much of tragedy to be bloodthirsty; she could let Bryan go, in the assurance that the safety of Madeleine was of infinitely greater import than the legal punishment of a villain. Bryan was gone; let him be forgotten. . . .

She opened the door of her sitting-room, and went in. The candelabra was alight, and its radiance fell upon a figure that rose from its chair as she entered. Kate's eyes were dazzled, and she fancied at first that she was deceived by some mental or optical hallucination. But, as she stood motionless, staring, the figure spoke, and the tones, as well as the aspect and bearing, were those of Bryan Sinclair, and of no other

His identity and reality were unmistakable, and he was speaking to her; but how he came there, or what he was saying, Kate had at the moment no conception. She stood in a sort of horror-stricken trance, unable to remove her eyes from his face, or to bring her mind into any kind of relation with the incredible fact; mechanically, and without being in the least aware of it, she drew off her gloves, rolled them together, and put them in her pocket. Bryan Sinclair in her room! Was he a vision, or was the murder a dream? No, both were real. How was it, then?

Bryan was carefully dressed in evening costume; his face was smooth-shaven. There seemed to be a smile on his features. What was this he was saying?

'I accidentally came across your address this afternoon. I was on my way to the "Français," and took the opportunity to drop in. But I thought Stanhope was with you. If I can have a chat with him, I won't detain you any longer. Where is he?'

'Where is—who?' asked Kate, in a low, grating tone, that did not seem to her to proceed from her own lips.

'Stanhope—Stanhope Maurice. He came over with you, surely? I presume you are both on the same errand as myself—to search for

Madeleine? What I want to know is, whether you have succeeded any better than I. What's the matter, Mrs. Roland?'

'You murdered him—what more do you want to know?' said Kate, unsteadily.

Black spots were beginning to dance before her eyes, and she was conscious of a mad inclination to laugh. The fear that she was going to faint, or to lose her mind, came upon her with a shock, and aided her to recover herself. Bryan laid down his hat and gloves, and gazed at her in seeming amazement.

'I suppose you speak figuratively,' said he, after a pause, 'though it's rather severe to call the successful rival of a man his murderer; not to mention that I'm not so successful as I could wish, either. But, really, has anything happened?'

'I will tell you what has happened, if you have forgotten,' returned Kate, rousing herself from her stupor, and speaking with a certain wildness of manner. 'You and Tom Berne met Stanhope this evening at the cabaret in Rue Jérome. Tom had made the appointment with Stanhope a week ago in London. Stanhope thought Tom meant to betray you; but I believed then, as I know now, that it was a plot you had made between you. You drew him on to the waste place at the end of the lane, and there you killed him. I came up a few minutes afterwards, but I was too late. You had run away, and he was dead.'

'And he was dead?' repeated Bryan, looking intently at her. He seemed to consider a while, and then he asked, 'Were you in time to see murderers making off?'

'I saw—enough.'

'And you think I killed him—on the evidence of Tom Berne. Now, Mrs. Roland,' said Bryan, in a low, determined tone, 'I shall speak to you plainly. I am here, and you can have me arrested and examined as soon as you like; in fact, I'll save you that trouble; I shall communicate with the police myself. I can't afford to have such a suspicion resting on me. But first I will say, for my own satisfaction, that I am sorry Stanhope is dead—if he really is dead. He was not in my way, though you and he may have thought otherwise.'

'I know more than you think,' interrupted Kate. 'He had proofs of crimes enough to hang you. You killed him to save yourself.'

'Crimes? I have never been a saint; but I have done nothing to put me in fear of the law. Where are these proofs?'

'Oh, you could rob him after you murdered him; but that shall not save you.'

'Where did he get the proofs? Was it from Tom Berne?'

'I shall answer no questions.'

'You will have to answer them at the inquest. But please yourself; I can have no interest but to bring the murderer to justice. And I have already a notion who he is.'

'Well, it shall be proved.'

'It shall, certainly. Now as to Tom Berne. I dismissed him from my service more than two weeks ago. I have not seen him since. I arrived in Paris this forenoon.'

'Those are falsehoods!'

Bryan smiled.

'Tom Berne has reason to be my enemy. I thrashed him and broke his spirit years ago. In California I was the cause of his shooting his own brother. I have always known that he wanted revenge; but hitherto he has been restrained by fear. Since his dismissal he seems to have been at work. The fellow has cunning, and he is desperate. I can see now what his scheme was. He made Stanhope believe that he was still in my employ. He gave him forged proofs of some crime, I don't know what. He pretended that he would bring about a meeting between Stanhope and me. He lured him to some out-of-the-way place, and there he murdered him, designing to throw the suspicion of the deed on me. Those are what I take to be the facts, Mrs. Roland. The plan had infernal ingenuity, but it will not succeed. If Berne is innocent he will come forward and testify. Do you know where he is?'

'For aught I know, you have murdered him too,' said Kate.

But Bryan's story, told with such directness and force, had shaken her a little; and Bryan saw it.

'There is no man whom it more concerns me to keep alive,' he answered. 'Until he has been found, tried, and condemned, I can be neither safe nor content. And whether you believe me innocent or not, it is equally your interest that this man should be produced. Without him you can do nothing.'

This was undeniable. If Bryan were guilty, Tom Berne's testimony would be indispensable to a conviction. On the other hand, unless Tom were guilty, why did he not come forward and make his accusation? That he should have been an accomplice in the crime did not occur to Kate; there seemed to be no reason for it. Either Bryan had done the murder, or Tom had done it; and she could not but perceive that, so far as appeared, there was at least as much ground for suspecting Tom as Bryan. But she was not ready to make the admission.

'You have put him out of the way,' she said.

'Come, Mrs. Roland, don't be silly!' he exclaimed, taking up his hat and gloves. 'How long is it since Stanhope was killed?'

'About three hours.'

'Very well. Since that time, according to your notion, I must have hunted out Tom, murdered him, disposed of his body, gone to my hotel and dressed myself for the play, and then come here, of all places in the world! You pay a high compliment to my promptness and self-possession. I say you are silly!'

'Oh, if I could only know!' groaned Kate, dropping into a chair, and covering her face with her hands.

'Keep your head clear and your courage up, and you shall know, returned he. 'Have you had anything to eat?'

'Anything to eat?'

'Well, you never needed something more. The kind of work we have to do cannot be done on an empty stomach.'

He went to the bell and rang it, and when the waiter came he ordered him to bring an omelette for the lady, a pint of sherry, and coffee. While these were being brought, he remained silent and apparently preoccupied. Kate, partly from physical weakness, and partly because her reason kept assuring her (in spite of an intuitive feeling to the contrary) that this man, however much a scoundrel generally, could not be guilty of this crime, was also silent, and tacitly submitted to the situation. Surely a man fresh from the murder of his victim could not act, speak, and appear thus; he would be either more or less than human. She was not aware how much human nature includes.

The food and wine came, and Kate found herself able to eat. When she had finished, she looked at Bryan, as if to ask him what was to be done next.

'I have thought it out, Mrs. Roland,' he said, 'and I think I should lose no time in seeing a police-officer in your presence. If you will allow me, I will ring the bell, and ask one to be sent here, and you shall hear me put the case to him. I will give myself into custody for the night, and to-morrow I shall be present at the inquest. Does that satisfy you?'

Kate signified her assent, and this was done accordingly. Bryan told his story to the gendarme, constantly referring to Kate for confirmation and assistance. The officer, having listened attentively and made his notes, informed Bryan that the evidence scarcely seemed to require that he should be detained, but Bryan insisted upon surrendering his freedom until after the inquest. He was consequently provided with a comfortable apartment at the House of Detention for the night. The next day the examination was held, and at the conclusion of it Bryan was liberated upon his own recognisances, and detectives were put on the track of Tom Berne.

Bryan returned to his hotel; and there he drew a long breath!

The preceding twenty-four hours had, indeed, been a trial even to such nerves as his. Tom Berne's scheme to bring about a meeting between him and Stanhope Maurice was conceived, and, in great measure, carried into effect, without Bryan's being aware of it. It was desired by Tom for ends of his own, and Bryan's participation in it was mainly involuntary. The perverted subtlety which had been developed in Tom's mind by his strange relations with his master was beginning to bear fruit. Bryan found himself controlled by a force against which he was unable to contend, because it was a purely spiritual one. To attempt to grapple with it was to fight the air. Tom evidently believed in a God, and in His will and power to punish crime; and he was able also to discriminate sharply between mere

worldly success and prosperity, and spiritual ruin. He assiduously cajoled and entrapped his master into every sort of wickedness, from a conviction that he was thereby consigning him to hell without hope of salvation. His zeal and faithfulness in all tangible and practical respects were unimpeachable; he would spare no efforts to preserve his master from physical injury or failure; he would even have sacrificed his life for the sake of enabling Bryan to commit some crowning atrocity. In short, he would have done anything to protect Bryan from ever suffering any legal or corporeal penalties for his crimes—both in order that these might go on increasing, and that their eternal punishment might be unprejudiced. It is worth noting, finally, that Tom had no hesitation in consigning himself to perdition, if only Bryan's destruction was assured; and it may have been that among his infernal anticipations was the hope that he and his enemy would be united hereafter, to torture and be tortured through all eternity.

Bryan, meanwhile, was beginning to manifest visible traces of this treatment. His buoyant animal spirits, and the steady self-possession arising from physical health and strength, showed signs of giving way. The fresh, florid complexion—evidence of a sound organism and vitality which no excess or hardship had been able to impair—had noticeably deteriorated of late, and there were furrows in the iron contours of his visage, which were not there a year ago. His features, in repose, had acquired an habitual frown, and from under his red brows his blue eyes stared forth gloomily. His moods, when he was not under the necessity of acting some part, alternated between reckless gaiety and morose sternness; he seemed to feel that he was lost, and to demand compensation in some way—in revenge against society, in debauch, in any hitherto unimagined wickedness; in something to make miserable; in something to destroy. Nevertheless, through the brooding of this murky atmosphere gleamed ever and anon the white ray of the only redeeming passion of his heart—the only as yet undefiled recess of his soul—which, therefore, he would now, with Tom's co-operation, proceed to defile. For there is a terrible necessity upon evil to become more evil still.

Bryan had sent Tom before him to Paris, to secure apartments and to attend to certain other matters, and he himself had arrived (as he told Kate) on the morning of the murder. Tom, meanwhile, had made his private arrangements; having placed in Stanhope's hands evidences (whether genuine or not we need not inquire) of Bryan's misdeeds calculated to persuade the baronet that Bryan was at his mercy; having thus assured Stanhope's attendance at the rendezvous, it was only necessary to inform Bryan that Stanhope was intending something against him, in order to bring about the meeting. With a praiseworthy attention to details, he had also taken steps to enable his master to establish the *alibi* which he foresaw would afterwards be desirable. For the rest, he relied upon the natural course of events, and upon his own timely assistance at the critical moment. The affair

had been fatally successful, and Bryan had found himself unexpectedly and almost involuntarily hurried into a murder, which, though really of Tom's contriving, had the appearance of being inevitable and accidental. It was a useless crime, as well as a dangerous one, and seemed likely to interfere seriously with Bryan's plans as regarded Madeleine. It was by no means Tom's intention, however, that the latter should miscarry. He had provided the means of an immediate change of apparel, and it was at his suggestion that Bryan adopted the apparently desperate course of at once presenting himself before Kate Roland. It was further arranged that Tom should be made the scapegoat of the crime; and while he withdrew from public view, Bryan would be left at liberty to pursue his designs unimpeded.

There was, thus a strange mingling of truth and falsehood in Bryan's position. He had killed Stanhope without premeditated purpose, and his consciousness of this fact the better enabled him to assume the attitude of absolute innocence. He hated Tom, and this hatred gave colour and force to the words in which he denounced him as the murderer. There was, besides, that universal instinct of self-justification which is at the core of every sinner's soul, be his sins what they may; and that other instinct of self-preservation, which, at a pinch, can make even a coward seem brave. Bryan Sinclair was no coward; nevertheless, he needed all these supports, and no less, to carry him successfully through that interview with Kate Roland—especially through those eternal minutes whilst she was supping, and he, in pursuance of his *rôle*, sat by, silent and motionless. It had seemed to him during those minutes as though his brain would burst, as though he must leap to his feet and roar forth his rage and horror—must even murder her, as an opiate to the gnawing exasperation of his hateful plight. Such experiences leave their mark upon both body and soul. And when Bryan, in the safety of his own room, was free at length to cast aside the torturing burden of suspense, he was by far a more wicked and a more desperate man than he had ever been before.

Tom Berne, in the meantime, had so managed his own affair as to be secure from pursuit or detection, though he was not so far removed from the scene as to be unable to keep an eye on the progress of events. There may be a mystic intelligence or sympathy between those who desire each other's destruction, as there is said to be between those who deeply love. If so, Tom's dreams that night must have been sweet.

CHAPTER XLVI.

'A mind might ponder its thought for ages, and not gain so much self-knowledge as the passion of love shall teach it in a day.'

Not far from Notre-Dame, in a quiet narrow street branching aside from one of the main thoroughfares of the city, an artist had fixed his residence. He occupied an apartment of three rooms on the third storey. Passing in by the main entrance—the *concierge* was not very strict in the observance of his duties, and was half the time gossiping round the corner with a certain neat widow who kept a milk shop—you ascended a dark and tortuous flight of stone stairs, and arrived at a door to which was affixed a card bearing this inscription:—M. Jean Jacques, Sculpteur des Animaux. Having knocked at this door, it was presently opened by a tall young man, of noble bearing, handsome and sensitive countenance, and simple and straightforward manner. He was clad in a grey flannel blouse reaching half-way to his knee, and loose trousers; his feet were encased in embroidered moccasins of buckskin, which displayed their elegant shape to advantage. The smile with which this personage greeted you was full of kindness and pleasantness, tempered with a fine reserve almost amounting to shyness. The room into which you were admitted was well lighted and of fair dimensions. The walls and ceiling were painted a light grey; against the former were fastened up the heads and skins of various wild animals—the wolf, the elk, the cimmaron, the grizzly bear. Other hides were spread out here and there upon the bare floor. Between two windows stood a small table, on which were writing materials, and a water-pitcher and mug. In the centre of the room was erected a large stand, like an oval table, with a raised platform of less area supported upon it. This stand was covered with drapery of a soft brown hue, falling quite to the floor; upon it were disposed a score or more of groups and figures of wild animals, from a foot to three feet in length; a few of these were in bronze, the rest in plaster. At the northern end of the studio was another sort of stand, constructed on the principle of a revolving stool; it bore a large mass of clay, which was partly wrought into the likeness of a crouching panther. In the corner near by was a huge earthenware vessel containing more clay; and odds and ends of plaster casts, moulds, tools, and anomalous rubbish were scattered about. There were three or four wooden and cane-bottomed chairs, and a rough oaken chest, which, with the aid of a couple of fox-skins and an Indian blanket, was made to do service as a sofa. Beneath the head of the grizzly bear on the wall were suspended a rifle, a tomahawk, and a bow and arrows; while on the opposite side of the room were similarly displayed a buckskin hunting-shirt ornamented with wampum, and a pair of game-bags with the like decoration.

Into this secluded and tranquil retreat the noisy current of the world, with its hurry, its heat, its passion, and its struggle, never found its way. It belonged to another sphere of being—serene, meditative, imaginative, artistic. It had all the freedom of art, and all the repose of the cloister. It was a place where the muse came, and where ideas were conceived and elaborated and brought to embodiment. The abode of art—blessed offspring of the more ethereal energies of heart and brain, innocent alike of passion and of selfishness. The room was a test of the visitor; ere he had been here long, he began either to gasp for lack of the denser air he was wont to inhale, or else to respire long delightful breaths of pure enjoyment—according to his nature and instruction.

The life of M. Jean Jacques, the sculptor, was as quiet and simple as his dwelling. There was a small kitchen attached to this apartment, in which the decent old lady who cooked the meals and kept the rooms in order was generally to be found. The other occupant of the place—for there were three—was a stout-hearted, deep-voiced, and vigorous little girl, with a round brave face and large black eyes, full of alternate laughter and solemnity. When she walked, she ran; and when she ran, she bent her shaggy little head, and butted forward like a miniature bison. She was emphatic and sweeping in her tones and ways, and it seemed as if nothing mortal could withstand her onset. She was forcible and demonstrative both in love and in anger; she was fond of showing her affection for her father by sitting astride his knee, and delivering a succession of blows into his chest. She was of an adventurous and exploring spirit, and pushed her investigations in all directions; but, being endowed with preternatural good luck and a strong instinct of locality, she seldom got into serious trouble, and never got lost—although her little visage generally showed the scar of some headlong tumble, and she frequently disappeared temporarily from the sight and knowledge of her domestic environment. Her playthings were for the most part the models of wild animals in her father's studio; the plaster ones she not seldom smashed to pieces, but the bronzes were her faithful friends; and she was in the habit of carrying about under her arm a stuffed wolf's head, by way of a doll. One of her particular joys was to visit the Jardin des Plantes, and there to gaze at the wild beasts in their cages; sometimes feeding them with buns, and sometimes menacing them with the little stick she carried in her hand. Her costume was a straight, dark blue garment of stout cloth reaching to her knee, trimmed and embroidered with crimson; her head-dress, when she wore one, was of the same style and material, with a crimson feather stuck in the band; and round her neck she wore a broad necklace of wampum. Altogether, she was like a little brook, tumbling and babbling through the heat of a quiet and shadowy forest, and thereby enhancing both its charm and her own.

There was never any great rush of purchasers to M. Jacques' studio. The study of American wild animals in their artistic aspect

did not as yet constitute an essential part of Parisian education. The sculptor, however, did not seem to be cast down by neglect: he evidently had large internal resources, and possibly (in spite of his modest way of living) pecuniary ones as well. A few artists visited him; and there were not wanting among them some who appreciated at its true value, or thereabouts, the singular merit and originality of his work. But personally he was a good deal of a mystery even to those who saw the most of him. Though he spoke French with facility, he was evidently not a Frenchman—at any rate not a Parisian—and it seemed likely therefore that the name he went by was not his real one. But artists are men of liberal views and small curiosity, and their opinion of one another is not apt to be determined by coats, names, or even nationalities. Jean Jacques was a good fellow and a genius; and if he had a history behind him which he was not disposed to talk about, so much the better or the (worse as the case might be) for him. It was nobody else's business. He was phenomenally domestic and retired in his habits, and never was seen at the *cafés* and other resorts of artists in their leisure hours; and there was, at times, something strange in his manner—as if he saw and spoke with visions. Doubtless M. de Balzac or Eugène Sue might make an interesting volume of his adventures, could they be known. Meanwhile the picturesque mystery that invested him afforded an agreeable exercise for the imagination.

One day, as this mysterious personage was at work upon his crouching panther, his hand was arrested by a lusty noise of crying that came through the open window that looked upon the street. He sprang to the window and looked out. A lady, handsomely dressed, was stooping down on the pavement, with her arms round a little girl in a blue and crimson frock, who had apparently just fallen down and gashed herself on the chin. Without waiting for a second look, M. Jacques turned and hurried downstairs, four steps at a time. On arriving at the street entrance he met the lady, leading the child by the hand. He caught the latter up in his arms, and then perceived that the lady was Lady Mayfair.

She recognised him at the same moment, and, with the instinctive self-possession and courtesy of a woman of the world, smiled and held out her hand. He, feeling surprise perhaps, but no embarrassment, greeted her with cordiality.

'So this is your Manita?' she said. 'I am sorry it should have cost her that cut on the chin to re-introduce us to each other; and yet I am glad to have been at hand.'

'Manita often tumbles down,' he replied, 'but no harm comes of it.'

'And will not now, so far as I am concerned,' said Lady Mayfair, smiling again. 'Do you live here, my lord?'

'I live here—not Lord Castlemere. I left him in the Channel. I am an artist whom nobody knows. Will you come up and see?'

'I had given up the expectation of finding you,' said she, follow-

ing him up the winding staircase, 'though I came to Paris partly in hopes of doing so.'

On reaching the upper landing, the artist led the way into the studio, and, having invited his guest to take a seat on the oaken-chest sofa, he applied himself to sponging the blood from Manita's chin, and covering the cut with a piece of black plaster—an operation to which the child submitted with stoical silence; but when it was over, she held the gory sponge towards Lady Mayfair, and said in deep bass tones, 'See, my blood!' She then possessed herself of her wolf's head, and went off to play in a corner.

'You are Monsieur Jean Jacques, then?' said her ladyship, who had already cast her eyes about the room. 'Are you a disciple of Rousseau?'

'No: Jacques was one of the names of my mother's father, who brought me up. I have tried being my father's son, and now I am going to be the son of my mother.'

'You find it pleasanter to be an artist than a peer of England?'

'It is better to be nothing but one's self.'

'But what will become of the peerage, and all that?'

'I have taken money enough for Manita. The rest will go——' He appeared to be on the point of saying more, but checked himself.

'Shall you live here always?' continued Lady Mayfair, after a pause.

He shook his head. 'There will be something else for me to do, some day,' he said. 'After that I think I shall go back to America.'

'Have you seen Madeleine?' she demanded abruptly.

'No,' he answered composedly. 'I think of her often, but we meet only when destiny will have it so. I would rather not talk about her.'

'Not even if it might lead to your saving her from a great danger?'

'When she is in danger, I shall know,' returned he, with that singular fatalism that sometimes inspired him. His idea seemed to be—an idea common to men of his peculiar temperament and organisation—that nothing of profound spiritual interest to him could occur anywhere without his being made mystically aware of it.

'I know you well enough not to try to understand you, as I would understand other people,' said his visitor, fixing her beautiful eyes upon him. 'You are to be understood only as music is—by imagination and sympathy. You never do what I expect you to do, or say what I try to make you say. I don't know why I should ask you so many questions. I am, myself, in a questionable frame of mind—that may be the reason. I care for nothing that I used to care for, and, unlike you, I have found nothing new to care about. But there are some things I have done that I should like to undo.'

'Doing and undoing both are hard work,' observed the sculptor, philosophically.

'Do you see much of Bryan Sinclair?' inquired the other.

'Not at all, since I left England.'

'You used to be great friends. He introduced you to me.'

'He knew a great many things.'

'Too many things!' rejoined her ladyship, with a peculiar smile. 'He means mischief. After the way you and I parted a few weeks ago,' she continued, in a more artificial tone, 'you might be surprised to see me here; but I have lost my pride, as well as other things. All I desire is, to prevent Bryan from injuring others as he has injured me. And I do not know, in all the world, any other man besides you who can help me to do this. You are the only man I ever met who seemed to me able to fight against Bryan Sinclair, and to conquer him.'

'What reason have I to fight against him?' asked he.

'The reason that makes good always fight against evil, and truth against falsehood. And there is another special reason—but I think I will not tell you what that is yet. You shall know when the time comes, and that will not be long.'

The sculptor made no reply. The sun slanted through the southern window, and fell upon Manita, playing with her wolf's head in the corner. The large stand in the centre of the room, with its soft brown drapery and its groups of statuary, in which the fierce and wild nature of the animals represented was beautiful and exalted by the subtle purpose and repose of art; the quaint mingling of civilised simplicity and primitive savagery in the aspect and furnishing of the studio; the noble and thoughtful face and figure of the artist himself—as Lady Mayfair contemplated all this, all at once she heaved a quick, sharp sigh, and a few bitter tears rose to her eyes. The tragedy of this life is, that peace and misery, repose and ruin, so often meet each other face to face, and seem to touch hands, though the real gulf between them is impassable.

'You are happy and content, are you not?' said she.

'There are no such things as contentment and happiness,' replied he. 'The best that people are able to do in this world is to change the nature they were born with. If I could think of nothing, I should be contented; but as soon as thought begins, I am sad. Something is always missing; and if the thing that I miss were here, it would only show me that I miss something else. I can think of infinite things, but I can know only things that are not infinite. Always I feel that something ought to be, which is not. To be happy, I should feel that nothing is not that ought to be. The world seems not to be made to fit the people who live in it. Animals are happy—they cannot imagine what cannot be; their world fits them. To be worldly-wise is to limp along, as the path opens, from one point to another, and never look ahead. But I would rather see despair than not see at all. I long for the stars though I can never reach them; but perhaps the longing is worth more than the stars; at any rate I am sure that the stars would not satisfy it. It is awful to think that there can be no end of it all; but it would be still more

awful to think that there could be an end. The only happiness or contentment is in fighting against happiness and contentment, for they are death. But if they are death, what is the good of life?'

'You have taught yourself a dreary creed,' remarked Lady Mayfair. 'Can you find no happiness in love?'

'To love is to wish to give more than love can receive, and to receive more than it can give. It is at its best when what we love is far away and unattainable. As soon as it comes within reach, though it has more power, it is less beautiful. I have often tried to think what God is, and I can only think Him to be all the things that men love in one another. So my god is the woman that I love; but if she were with me, and loved me in return, she would be less god. For what I love in her can never belong to me, and so to make her mine would be to make her less lovable. It is the same story over again.'

'Is there life after death?' said Lady Mayfair.

'I do not know what you call death,' he replied. 'I do not believe that I and my body are one. My body is dead already; there is nothing alive but life. My body is the instrument that my soul plays upon, as I play upon the strings of my banjo. If all the strings were broken, I could no longer play upon them; but you would not therefore say that I did not any longer exist. So, when my body ceases to answer to the touch of my soul, you cannot say that my soul has ceased to exist. I am independent of my banjo, and my soul is independent of my body. My body is dead, and can never live; my soul is alive, and can never die; nor can I die, when they are separated.'

'You can, at any rate, be a philosopher, and philosophy is consolation,' said Lady Mayfair, rather bitterly. 'No one ever philosophised with his heart. There is something more real than reasoning, and more convincing. I do not know whether love be wise, but I have felt what love is. I do not know whether happiness be possible, but I have known happiness. I may have no more reason to be miserable than you have, but I am more miserable. And I have been more alive than I shall ever be again; and I have felt what death is, though you say I can never die. You are discontented with the world, it seems; but it has used you better than it has me. A man's heart is a will-o'-the-wisp, but a woman's heart is all she is. A man's conduct and conversation may appear virtuous, though his heart be evil; but when a woman's heart is evil, she is evil to the marrow of her bones; and if her heart be good her evil is no more than dust that can be brushed away. We cannot stand being roughly used, as you can; it ruins us. Look at me, my lord—or whatever you wish to be called; I am not what I was even when you first knew me. I made a good fight for it; I held my head up with the best of them; but, at heart, I was beaten long ago; and the only thing that I thought could have saved me turned out to be the cruellest blow of all. Yet I might go on still; there is nothing to prevent my being Lady

Mayfair for a few years more; but I have had enough. If I were a man, I should desire some way of revenging myself upon society; but I have not life enough even for revenge. The only thing I shall do is, perhaps, the most foolish and hopeless of all—to try to save another woman from suffering what I have suffered; not that I love her—there is more reason why I should hate her—but simply because she is a woman. I thought you might help me, and I shall give you the chance to do so; but perhaps it would disturb your philosophic calm too much. I am afraid I have disturbed it already, with my feminine complaints and scoldings,' she added, suddenly assuming a smiling tone and aspect. She rose from her seat and moved towards the door.

'I do not move myself. I am moved without my will,' said the sculptor, rising also. 'Will you come here again?'

'No; good-bye!' She had nearly reached the door, when all at once she turned, and walking quickly back to the corner in which Manita was sitting, she raised the child in her arms, and kissed her passionately and repeatedly. Then she passed out, and the child's father heard the great lady descend the stairs. He threw himself down in his chair, and remained for a long time deeply musing, with his cheek upon his hand.

CHAPTER XLVII.

'Ever the words of the gods resound,
But the porches of man's ear
Seldom, in this low life's round,
Are unsealed, that he may hear.'

For some time past Paris had been interesting itself about a new actress who had appeared at one of the theatres. Whence she came, none knew; nor did any facts as to her previous history seem obtainable. To judge from her speech, and from her personal appearance, she was a Frenchwoman; but the style of her acting did not show the influence of the French dramatic school of that period, and it was the opinion of many that she must be of foreign extraction—possibly a Pole or a Russian. She was of a pale, dark complexion, with black hair and eyes; her figure was tall, and her bearing full of a marvellous dignity and grace. It was generally agreed that her physical advantages were superior to those of any other actress on the stage, and there was in her impersonations not only a remarkable breadth and dramatic intensity of interpretation, but a magnetic fascination which belonged to her temperament, and can never be acquired. Her stage business showed elaborate study, and something more than intelligence; while her unfamiliarity with the footlights, and with the presence of an audience, lent a certain freshness and

spontaneity to her performance, that custom and experience would be more apt to diminish than to enhance.

But it was still too early to forecast her future. Genius is always unlike any genius that has gone before; it has laws of its own and moves in a separate orbit. The characters she had thus far assumed were not of the first dramatic rank; and though her vigour and originality of conception invested them with a new importance, she might fail to bestow corresponding value upon a Medea or a Phèdre. The fact remained, meanwhile, that Madame Madeleine, as she was called, had succeeded in arousing an unusual amount of interest and discussion, insomuch that reports of her began to penetrate beyond the boundaries of the Parisian world, and had awakened echoes in the neighbouring planet of London.

At this juncture, to everyone's surprise, she brought her engagement in Paris to an abrupt conclusion, and vanished from the sight and knowledge of men. For a week or so no one could tell what had become of her. At last, one morning, the front of a certain London theatre was placarded with a notice to the effect that Madame Madeleine, from Paris, would make her *début* on the English stage in the character of Cleopatra, in Shakespeare's immortal play of 'Antony and Cleopatra.' The cast was fairly good, and the manager begged to state, in answer to numerous inquiries, that Madame Madeleine spoke English with as much fluency as French.

There was nothing very stimulating in this announcement, beyond that the play was one which has been very rarely given, and that a *début* (especially of an actress who spoke English with as much fluency as French) is always something of a curiosity. Nevertheless, during the last three days, between the announcement and the performance, the enterprise was pretty widely discussed; and, from one cause or another, the sale of seats, which had begun slowly, went on with increasing rapidity, until nearly the whole house was sold, and there was no doubt that there would be a crush by the time the curtain rose. So far, then, the venture was already a success. But whether Madame Madeleine would make a hit in a part as to which there were next to no 'traditions' for the guidance of a *débutante*, and which Mrs. Siddons had refused with the remark that, 'if she played it as it should be played, she would never afterwards respect herself,'—these were questions as to the solution of which the manager was at least as doubtful as anyone else.

Madame Madeleine occupied a humble suite of rooms in Bloomsbury. On the morning of the day which was to make or mar her dramatic reputation, a cab drew up before the house, and a man in a talma and a broad-brimmed felt hat got out and ran up the steps. The door was immediately opened, as if the visitor had been expected, and he went in.

He was ushered into a room on the first floor, and in a few moments Madeleine entered. She was dressed in a morning gown of soft white material; her arms were bare below the elbow; she wore

necklace and earrings of red coral. Her long black hair was divided into two massive braids, which hung down her back. Her face seemed a trifle thinner than usual, but her eyes had never been so full of subtle fires of expression, and her voice was full of a rich and resonant tremulousness that stirred the heart.

'You come at a dangerous time, Bryan,' she said. 'To-day I am the Queen of Egypt!'

'A pleasant greeting, when I've hardly set eyes on you in two months,' returned he gloomily. 'Are you glad to see me?'

'Was Cleopatra glad to see Mark Antony?'

'She made him believe so.'

'You hardly seem yourself, Bryan. "How much unlike art thou, Mark Antony!" Do you love me as much as ever?'

There was a touch of mockery in her tone. But it was quite true that Bryan did not look his usual self. He was haggard with fatigue and want of sleep, and his air was sullen and uneasy.

'A man doesn't come to see a woman at the risk of his life unless he cares for her,' said he moodily. 'I'm being hunted at this moment by a couple of damned detectives. But here I am, and I want to know what you are going to do?'

'I am going to act Cleopatra.'

'And what after that?'

'Oh, Cleopatra dies in the last act.'

'Yes, but Madame Madeleine comes to life again.'

'Does she? That depends!'

'Come, Madey, this is no time for nonsense! I can't stay here nor in Europe any longer. We must think about getting away.'

'Where do you wish to take me?'

'America will do for the present.'

'But London suits me better.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Why should I sacrifice my prospects to you? What have you ever sacrificed for me?'

'I am likely to sacrifice a great deal for you if I stay here.'

'You're a criminal, then—a fugitive from justice?' she said, with a strange smile.

'I'm the devil himself, if you choose. But I'm only guilty of what my accusers can prove against me.'

'And you show your love for me by asking me to share your peril and possible ruin! What would you do if you hated me?'

'Let us have this out, once for all,' said Bryan, seating himself and folding his arms. 'I can't do without you, and I'm bound to have you. It might be better for both of us, as far as safety and convenience goes, to keep apart; but it's our luck to be together, and we shall be to the end. And I know, as well as I know heat from cold, that you love me, and will love no one else till you die. Give me your hand, my girl, and come with me. Whatever else I may be I'm

a man, and the only man for you. Let us stick together and defy the world. Come!'

But Madeleine drew back, and clasped her hands behind her. Yet her aspect was not repellent; a fugitive smile went and came about her lips, and her eyes intently perused his face.

'Cannot you really do without me?' she said, uttering the words slowly. 'After all these years we are to go to America—to some of those western places you have told about—and be happy together—talking over our past crimes and committing new ones! Every morning we would awake fresh and buoyant in the hope of a new sin, and every night we would sleep peacefully with some new evil sprouting in our hearts! Do you suppose, Bryan, that in hell there are many pairs of lovers as happy as we shall be?'

'Talk away, if it amuses you,' said he, drawing his brows together. 'You will have to come to me in the end.'

'How can I help being light-hearted?' she returned, with another smile. 'I have waited all my life, you know, for the realisation of my love-dreams, and now it is at hand. And I have refused ever so many eligible offers—Stanhope Maurice, for instance. By the way—did you kill him?'

The question was abruptly and sharply put. Bryan's face flushed red, and his mouth twitched.

'No,' he said, after a moment.

'Of course—I forgot—it was Tom Berne,' said Madeleine quietly. She moved to another part of the room, and came back with a morocco case in her hand. 'See what I have,' she said, handing it to him.

It contained an exquisitely wrought model of a small serpent, made of gold, finely jointed, and enamelled in colours to imitate life. When taken from the case it seemed to writhe and wriggle as if it were veritably alive.

'Well, what about this?' demanded Bryan gruffly. 'What is it for?'

'It is "the pretty worm of Nilus, that kills and pains not." It is for Cleopatra to-night.'

'If all your properties are on this scale you'll need a fortune! That bit of trumpery can't have cost less than three hundred pounds.'

'You remember that necklace of gold nuggets you gave me? It is made out of that. Is it not pretty?' she added, taking it and letting it glide caressingly through her fingers. 'And there's a secret about it—it is even more alive than it looks.' She pressed the little glistening reptile to her bosom, and murmured the dying words of the Egyptian Queen, '"Dost thou not see my baby at my breast that sucks the nurse asleep?"'

'A nice use to put my necklace to! I hate all snakes, and especially that one.'

'You don't know what an effect I'll make with it to-night. You have never seen me on the stage.'

'You asked me to keep out of your way—for reasons best known to yourself—and I've done so, though I don't see I've gained much by it.'

'I didn't want you to see me till I was sure of myself. But to-night I'll surprise you—for the first and last time.'

'Why the last?'

'In California we shall be too busy with our crimes for me to think of acting.'

'Will you never be serious? We ought to be making our arrangements.'

'I shall be ready. When you were going to take me to France, you know, I was ready beforehand. By the way, Bryan, was Lady Mayfair offended at my not accepting her as my chaperon?'

'I've never seen her from that day to this,' he replied.

'You said once that you meant to get everything, but cared to keep nothing. Will you care to keep me when you have married me?'

'Look here, Madey,' said Bryan, altering his position and rubbing his hands through his hair, 'you have brains and can listen to common sense. You know me: I've never denied that I'm an outlaw, at war with conventions and formulas. You and I, my girl, will have nothing to do with the empty formula called marriage. We will live together because we choose to do it, and the only bond upon us shall be our own free will. What has society ever done for us that we should wear chains of society's forging for society's benefit?'

'But,' said Madeleine, playing with her enamelled asp, 'what if it should be a whim of mine that we be regularly married?'

'Then you will have to hear the truth,' exclaimed he roughly, 'I am married already!'

'When? and to whom?' inquired Madeleine quietly.

'To Lady Mayfair—years ago.'

'And you are her lawful husband?'

'As lawfully as laws can make me. It was the old story—bless you! I wanted money; as to our domestic career, I soon let her know that would have to be dispensed with. But that's my situation, and it can't be altered.'

Madeleine had been looking full at him as he began to speak, but as he went on she turned gradually away from him, and walked to the window. When she faced about again she was very pale, and her eyes sparkled.

'Then you think it would be more agreeable to me to take you as another woman's husband than not to take you at all? Would you have married me if you had been unmarried?'

'I suppose I'd have done anything you asked me. But it's impossible.'

'Could you not get a divorce?'

'She might. I couldn't.'

'Really, Bryan, you have left nothing incomplete. I don't speak

of crimes; you might have been a criminal, and still have a fallen greatness. But your mouth is full of falsehoods, and your heart of foulness. I may well call myself an actress; I have played all characters except my own—I have been everything except myself, so that I might be something to you. If there were any power in love, I was resolved that my love should redeem you. I staked everything on that. And I might as well have thrown flowers into the bottomless pit! Instead of my redeeming and purifying you, you have soiled and ruined me. I wish all women might hear my story and profit by it.'

'What has set you off now?' demanded Bryan, gruffly.

'I gave you a chance at least to tell the truth—the truth could have done you no harm—but you would not. Well, I cannot follow you down any further—I cannot! Lady Mayfair was here yesterday, Bryan. To save me—though, without knowing it, I had been her rival, and she owed her sharpest grief to me—to save me, she told me everything. To save me, she has banished herself from the only life she can ever live. It was a more generous thing than I have ever done, with all my pains! You were never her husband, Bryan. You deceived her, and now, because you thought she would not dare to tell, you were going to use that deception to deceive me. But I am undeceived!'

'I knew you would find it all out sooner or later,' said Bryan, in a low voice, 'and when that time came, I knew you would rather not feel yourself bound to me.'

'It would have been too late. It is too late now. I have made my mistake, and I must take the consequences.'

'Then you won't leave me? You'll give me a chance?' he exclaimed, springing to his feet and holding out his arms.

'A chance——to do what? To kill Lord Castlemere, as well as Stanhope?'

'Madey, it was no murder!' said Bryan, with intense emphasis. 'He fell on the knife—it was not my doing nor my wish! I had offered him a duel.'

'You should have offered it to Lord Castlemere. It is he who has been your real rival, Bryan. You kept me from knowing him as the possessor of the estates; but I knew him, in another way, long ago—even before I knew you. And I would have loved him, but for you; I would love him now, if I were fit to love anything. But you need not be jealous,' she continued, with an odd little laugh. 'No man will ever take me away from you. You may do with me what you will—to-morrow.'

'I'll love you as you deserve to be loved, Madey,' said he. 'What you once told me is true—that I should feel, some day, what it is to have loved a woman like you; and that I would wish I might sell my soul to put right the harm I've done you. But, the fact is, I fancy my soul wouldn't buy much.'

'I am not much to buy—nor to be taken as a gift, either!' she

answered, smiling. 'But I bear you no ill will. Be at the theatre to-night; and after it's all over, come and see me behind the scenes.'

When he had gone, Madeleine replaced the serpent in its case, and prepared for the last rehearsal.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONCLUSION.

When the curtain rose on that memorable night, it disclosed a house in which every seat was occupied. Some of the best society of London was present, for it had been rumoured that the *débutante* was herself connected in some way with the English aristocracy. The few persons who actually knew the truth of the matter were also there, but it was not their cue to impart their knowledge. The bulk of the audience, of course, was made up of the great, thoughtless, genial, cruel, foolish British public, ready either to applaud, to hiss, to laugh, to cry, to toss up their greasy caps, or to tear the house to pieces, as chance might determine.

In the front row of the pit was seated a powerfully built, broad-shouldered fellow, who appeared from his costume to be a British tar. He wore a blue jacket, the broad collar turned back on his shoulders; trousers fitting close round the hips and wide at the feet; and a flat-crowned cloth cap on a head overgrown with close-cropped red hair, somewhat grizzled by time or hard living. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbow, showing the brawny muscles of his arms, which rested on the rail in front of him, and he sat leaning forward with his chin resting upon them, and his eyes fastened steadfastly upon the stage; occasionally he wetted his lips with the tip of a long pointed tongue.

Lord Piccadilly, his thin hair carefully brushed over the top of his white, retreating forehead, a flower in his button-hole and a blue ribbon across his breast, sat in the stage box on the right; on the left were Fred Beauchamp, and several of the younger men of the Grandison Club, all faultlessly dressed, with eye-glasses and bouquets. In the stalls were Captain Cavendish, with his Wellingtonian nose, and beside him Major Arthur Clanroy and Gertrude his wife. Lady Mayfair's box was unoccupied, and Fred Beauchamp remarked to the friend next him that he believed her ladyship was out of town.

'By the bye, wasn't she going to marry old Piccadilly?' inquired the friend.

'Yes; but Castlemere cut him out.'

'Castlemere, eh? What's become of him?'

'Ask the Mayfair!' said a third gentleman, with the grimace of a man of the world.

'I heard somewhere,' said the second speaker, 'that the fellow—what's his name?—Bryan Sinclair, had some affair or other with her. Know anything about it?'

'Gammon, I fancy,' returned Fred. 'Never believed half the yarns about Sinclair; not good form enough for the Mayfair. Hullo! By Jove, there she is now, just come in! Who's that woman in black, who keeps behind her? Never saw her before.'

'I can tell you,' said the man-of-the-world. 'That's the daughter of old Rear-Admiral Kavanagh; she married a chap by the name of Roland, and he ran away from her, or got killed, or something, on the day of the marriage. I met her once at the Maurices'. You heard about poor Stanhope's getting knocked on the head in Paris?'

'Yes,' said Beauchamp's friend. 'They say the fellow that did it is in London; detectives after him. Some blackguard of a French communist. Awful rough on Lady Maurice. I say, how pale the Mayfair is! Who's she looking at in the pit?'

'There goes the curtain!' exclaimed Fred; and the conversation ceased.

The play began; and the applause of courtesy to the *débutante*, which greeted her entrance with Antony, was quickly hushed by the sensation produced by her beauty, and the lithe, voluptuous charm of her bearing. And her voice, even in the first line spoken, redeemed the promise of her aspect. It was slow, luxurious, ear-filling, and sweet. 'If it be love indeed, tell me how much?' You seemed to breathe the warm, perfumed atmosphere of the Alexandrian palace; time had rolled back, and this was the era of paganism, of prodigality, of barbaric splendour, of heroic vices and virtues. Cleopatra was no myth; she was possible—she was a fact. 'I'll set a bourne, how far to be beloved!' What a gesture of the tawny, slender arms! What a glance and smile of imperial coquetry! Well might the triple pillar of the world reply, 'Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.'

Old play-goers pricked up their ears and adjusted their eye-glasses. This was evidently to be no ordinary performance. Here was originality without crudeness, and knowledge of the stage without staginess: Cleopatra was in Egypt, not in London, and the only audience of which she was conscious was Antony. The serpent of Old Nile was living and scheming, mocking and weeping, in the present hour—with her wisdom, her waywardness, her frolic and her fire, and the pervading royalty of her unmatched spirit. What man could withstand her? or who would not echo in his heart those passionate words of Antony—'Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space. Kingdoms are clay; the nobleness of life is to do thus!' In the presence of such a spectacle, criticism was postponed and forgotten, and nothing seemed desirable except to gaze and hear, and steep the mind in an experience so new, so stirring, and so strange. The Egyptian queen so completely filled the apprehension that the other characters seemed merely her inter-

preters and commentators; her character coloured and qualified every line of the play; she was the spirit and the mirror of her surroundings. Even the paltry scenery and appurtenances began to glow and sparkle with the magnificence of veritable royalty; and it was easy to believe that such a woman, in such an age, might melt inestimable pearls in her wine, or float in triumph on a barge whereof Enobarbus's description was but a pallid image. Her 'infinite variety,' which emphasised instead of obscuring her poignant individuality, kept the attention constantly alert; and the by-play and business opened to the view vistas of life and traits of character of which the spoken words seemed but the natural and inevitable culmination. The listener felt that it was only by chance that Cleopatra did not say a thousand other things besides those she actually uttered; and the impression given was not so much that she delivered Shakespeare's words correctly, as that, by a happy coincidence, Shakespeare had written in his play everything that the Queen of Egypt was saying. And such was the broad and intense veracity of her rendering, and so great the stimulus it gave to the imagination, that her existence seemed to be going on just as much when she was behind the scenes as when she was before the footlights; and one longed to attach himself to her train, and remain constantly within sound and sight of her regal fascination.

The end of the first act left the audience in a tumultuous accord of enthusiasm. Fred Beauchamp and his friends flung all their bouquets on the stage, and sent out for fresh supplies; Lord Piccadilly despatched something behind the scenes by a special messenger; and Captain Cavendish took snuff, rubbed his nose, and mused sentimentally over his vanished youth. Pit and gallery shouted, laughed, and babbled to one another; only the red-haired British tar remained silent and undemonstrative, with his arms folded, and his cap drawn down over his eyes. Gentlemen in the stalls went out to chat and compare notes in the lobby, and everybody seemed ready to agree that they were assisting at a very rare and fortunate event. There were, however, a few experienced and sagacious heads who, notwithstanding the present triumph—or, rather, because of it—looked forward to what was to come with some misgiving. Remembering the daring development given to Cleopatra's character in the play, and bearing in mind the extraordinary vividness and suggestiveness of the actress, and the unscrupulous energy with which she flung herself into the part, they were disposed to doubt whether the rigid respectability of the British public would put up with it. It might be easy, no doubt, by judicious excisions and modifications, to remove all apprehension on this score; but the actress manifestly intended no softening of the kind. She had entered into the matter with her whole heart and genius, and was thinking not at all of respectability and morality, but of Cleopatra, and all that Cleopatra meant.

'Don't know what she may be able to do in other characters,' murmured one of the wise men to another; 'but, by Jove, she's going

at it as if she'd lived all her life to play this part, and never was going to touch another!'

'It looks to me,' returned his interlocutor, 'as if she'd never lived at all till now, and now she were going to make the most of the opportunity to show what she really is.'

'Did you notice old Arthur Clanroy and his wife in the stalls?' said the other. 'The old woman looks as if she wanted to run away; but the major's as pleased as Punch. There's no doubt about it that the girl is their niece, though, from what little I've seen of her, I should never have anticipated anything like this. She's tremendous; but, by Jove, I'd rather be her admirer than her uncle, by a good deal!'

'They have begun again!' exclaimed his friend: and the two hurried back to their seats.

The second and third acts had been condensed into one, considerable portions of each being omitted, and the scenes in which Cleopatra appears being thereby brought nearer together. When she entered, dallying with memories of the absent Antony, and calling for 'music, moody food for us that trade in love!' it was easy to mark the singular control she had already established over her audience. This scene opens a wide door into the wayward, passionate, and fantastically savage nature of the Pharaohs' daughter; her rage against the unlucky messenger was expressed with terrible force, and before that interview was over the spectators were wrought up to a strange pitch of excitement; and from this moment two parties began to be formed among them. The division was not sharply emphasised at first, but, to those who were prepared for something of the sort, it was unmistakable. One side was for supporting the actress through thick and thin; the other was inclined to feel shocked, and to deprecate the uncompromising and unmitigated realism of her conception. The gap, once created, widened every minute, and when the antagonistic opinions became conscious of each other's antagonism they kindled into greater vehemence. A subdued murmur at times made itself heard, now and again gathering strength and volume; and, when Cleopatra towered high in passion, bursting forth into a roar of warring shouts and voices, fierce hisses and fiercer applause. The deadly conflict between Antony and Cæsar seemed to have been taken up by the audience; each man defied his neighbour, and ranged himself for battle. The excitement of the people communicated itself to the actors; the play seemed a play no longer, but a splendid concentration of reality, in which the greatest poet of the world gave utterance and eloquence to the fear and wrath, the affirmation and denial, the love and hate of the living moment. A calm student of human nature, had such a one been present, would have remarked, however, that every speech of Cleopatra's was distinctly heard; when she opened her lips to speak, a hush fell upon friends and foes alike, and each word that she uttered vibrated in every heart. Though she alone was the cause and the centre of the conflict, she was none the less a

queen, before whose royal genius all must bow. Thus she seemed to control the storm she had aroused, though every moment the waves of emotion and frenzy mounted higher. Was this the stolid British public? Where was their phlegm and coolness, their scepticism and indifference? They rather resembled a raging throng of creatures who had never heard of Christian civilisation, bellowing in a Roman amphitheatre—creatures unchecked by reason or reflection, and swayed only by a tyranny of blind feeling which had suddenly seized the reins of judgment, and was urging them to anarchy. Nothing was more remarkable, in the midst of this bewildered turmoil, than the inviolable self-absorption of the great Eastern star who was sweeping through the last mighty scenes of her orbit towards the tragic end. No sounds seemed to reach her ears, and nothing to be visible to her eyes, except the voices and the forms of the Egyptian slaves and Roman dignitaries among whom she moved. Such poise would have been heroic, if it had not been something more. But there are seasons in the experience of a human heart, when the passion or the desolation within it sunder it immeasurably from the utmost external turmoil and fury; and then reach it—if at all—but as the moaning of a winter wind, or as the rumble of wheels in distant streets. In the glare of terrible verities that floods the soul in these grim moments the uproar and violence of the world dwindles to a paltry stir and chatter, which, at most, feebly and vapidly reflect the moods that so awfully possess it. And as for Madeleine, she was both infinitely remote from the stage which she trod, and intensely present on it; for although her real nature and destiny were so unlike Cleopatra's, yet, in the utterance and situations of Cleopatra's story, she discovered a strange and deep delight. The elements of all tragedies are so far similar, that the profound and full expression of one anguish affords a measure of sympathetic relief to any of the others. Expression is relief; and the actress could sway the multitude because to do so was so merely incidental to the voicing of her own despair. Had she more consciously addressed them, she would probably have moved them less.

As the play rolled and thundered towards its close, the aspect of the house became more unrestrained and ominous. Most of the women had already left the theatre in alarm. The red-haired sailor in the front of the pit had latterly awakened from his apparent indifference, and had by degrees constituted himself the leader of those who aimed to have the drama acted out to the end. His herculean figure was plainly distinguishable as he waved his arms and applauded with savage energy, and occasionally his voice would peal forth above the other sounds like the bellowing of an angry bull. In some degree he divided with Cleopatra the attention of the seething crowd. All idea of giving the play entire, or, indeed, any of it except the scenes in which the queen herself appeared, had long ago been abandoned; and she was therefore almost constantly on the stage; and the footsteps of impending doom moved onward fast. At length the final scene was reached,

when fortune had flouted her its last, and she, never more loyal than now that all hope was gone, prepared to follow Mark Antony. On the threshold of her closing speech a sudden silence spread itself through the din, as if the audience were sensible that here was no pretended end of life. The slow words travelled lingeringly across the panting stillness:—

> Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have
> Immortal longings in me . . . Methinks I hear
> Antony call; I see him rouse himself
> To praise my noble act . . . husband, I come!
> Now to that name my courage prove my title!
> I am fire and air; my other elements
> I give to baser life.

She took the enamelled serpent from its basket: and hundreds of straining eyes saw her press it to her breast. She gave a slight start; her own eyes seemed to enlarge, and grow more darkly bright; a smile crept over her lips.

At this moment there was a renewed stir and murmur among the crowd, and a man, closely buttoned up in a dark coat, was seen to have climbed into the pit, and to be forcing his way towards the front, where the red-haired sailor was leaning with folded arms against the railing. As he approached him, the man glanced in the direction of Lady Mayfair's box. Her ladyship, with her companion in black, were among the few of their sex who had not already taken their departure. She in black was standing in front, and, as the man glanced at her, she raised her hand and pointed towards the sailor. The latter, at the same instant, happened to turn, and perceive her gesture. As quick as thought he faced about, and confronted the dark-coated man, whom many had by this time recognised as an officer of the police. The officer was by this time within arm's reach of the sailor, and put forth a hand to lay hold of him, uttering some words of which the only ones audible were, 'I arrest you——'

He never finished the sentence. The clenched fist of the sailor struck him on the mouth with a blow that sounded over the house like the impact of a mallet on raw meat. He was hurled back, bloody and senseless. The sailor instantly turned, leaped over the railing, and attempted to clamber on the stage.

'Stop him!' cried the woman in black, in a piercing voice. 'He is a murderer!'

A hoarse shout answered from a hundred throats, and many sprang forward to seize the fugitive. But an unforeseen occurrence checked them. A tall, hulking fellow, in the costume of an Egyptian guard, who had kept on the stage during nearly the whole of the performance, and who (as some afterwards affirmed) had several times exchanged signs of intelligence with the red-haired ruffian—this person was now seen to run forward, snatch up a lamp from among the footlights, and deliberately apply it to a projecting piece of scenery at the side of the stage. In a few seconds the inflammable stuff had caught fire, and a

long blaze went wavering upwards with a hissing and crackling sound. The flame communicated itself swiftly to other parts of the structure, soared abroad and reached out long arms at distant objects, while the hot rumbling of its busy progress throbbed in the ears of the terrified spectators, and its hot breath scorched their bloodless faces. Fragments of burning wood and canvas began to drop on the stage, and volumes of smoke rolled out, and filled the great space of the auditorium with a blinding and suffocating cloud. Meanwhile the audience had turned their backs, and were struggling inextricably together in a mad rush to escape. Shrieks, curses, heart-rending cries, took the place of the recent angry uproar; and the same multitude that a few minutes ago was so furious and formidable was now only pitiable and pathetic. As for the murderer, he had disappeared, none knew or cared whither. Few, at such times, know or care about anything except their own safety. Old Major Clanroy, however, having shoved his wife through a side-door into the comparative safety of the lobby, had valiantly climbed upon the stage, and groping his way through the smoke and flame to the place where Cleopatra was lying enveloped in her mantle, had dragged her in the direction of what seemed freer air, at the rear of the building.

That night, a tall athletic figure was walking rapidly through the streets of London, as if upon business of importance; and the people whom he met made way for him to pass, and sometimes turned to look after him, wondering at the preoccupation of his aspect. He bore himself erect, but his head was slightly bent forward, and his eyes fixed, as if gazing upon some object a short distance in front of him. His lips were pressed together, and there was a deep wrinkle between his brows, marked there by pain, or, perhaps, by some terror of the mind. As he strode on, his pace grew more rapid, and drops of sweat stood on his forehead. The affair upon which he was engaged must surely have been of pressing moment; and yet, had anyone taken the trouble to follow him, it would presently have become evident that this man knew not whither he was going, and was possibly not conscious of where he was, or of anything, except the viewless phantoms of his own brain. Something drove him onward; and something he pursued; but he could no more direct his course than he could arrest it; and ill would it fare with whomsoever should attempt to dispute the way with him. The fear was upon him, and he must hunt it and be hunted by it to the end, as, long ago, in the wild, wolf-haunted cañons of the Rocky Mountains. At length, a subdued roar of sound, waxing louder and louder, fell upon his ears; as he turned the corner of a street, it burst forth in full volume, and the phantom that he pursued drew him onward into the midst of it.

Shouts, running to and fro, wild clamour and disorder, a pall of stifling smoke, flashes of flame. Through the heart of the tumult lay the spectre's flight, and thither he followed it, and a path was

cleared before them. The crackling of fire, the rush and hiss of streams of water, the crash and fall of heavy objects in the darkness; a blistering heat—but forward he must go, though it were into the pit of hell itself. Staggering blindly through devious passages, he emerged into a great empty space, the limits of which were concealed by smoke and darkness, broken ever and anon by gushes of murky flame. It was resonant with confused noises and echoes; and through unseen avenues the uproar of the street came rolling in. The man, still following his invisible quarry, mounted upon a broad platform, overlaid with a wilderness of smouldering rubbish. Just then, a tall pilaster at the side of an arch which seemed to span this platform broke out into a flickering blaze; and by its light the man saw a figure advancing upon him. Here, then, at last, was his infernal adversary, come to try conclusions with him in the demon's proper abode. He drew in his breath, and braced himself for the struggle; and as Apollyon drew near he sprang upon him, and caught him in a grasp of desperate strength.

Apollyon, though somewhat shorter than his antagonist, had the thews and sinews of a greater than the sons of Anak. But, after the first instinctive movement of surprise, he scarcely attempted to shake off the hold that was laid upon him. The light from the burning pilaster fell full upon the other's face, which, though convulsed and ghastly in its expression, was not to be mistaken by anyone who had beheld it before. It was a face naturally beautiful, though now, in that lurid light, and amidst such surroundings, it was fearful to look upon. The fixed eyes seemed to stare into the beholder's soul, and to paralyse resistance; and the white teeth, set edge to edge, were visible between the bloodless lips. His arms and hands seemed to be made of steel.

'Why, Jack—Jack, old man!' exclaimed Apollyon, endeavouring to throw into his voice an accent of bluff cordiality, 'what's got into you? Don't you know your old friends? Didn't you and I dig gold together, and hunt grizzlies, in the Sacramento? What ails the fellow? Don't you know Bryan?'

No answer from Jack; no gleam of recognition in his fatal stare; only a tightening of his grasp, and a gradual edging towards a certain place where a trap-door had been opened in the stage, and a black abyss of darkness gaped below. This was no time for parley; if Bryan would save himself now, it must be by action, not by words. But he, who had so long bid defiance to the world, and who had never succumbed to any human strength, seemed at this moment of greatest need to be almost helpless. His visage, smirched with smoke, and bleeding from a cut on the forehead, was of a dull white hue, and his mouth, ordinarily so bold and resolute in its expression, drooped open, with quivering lips, as if the man were cowed by some frightful vision. It is said that persons in a trance state are able to exert powers almost superhuman; and to find yourself in the clutches of one in that condition, acting in obedience to some impulse outside

his own will, and no more to be reached by argument or entreaty than a devil-fish, is no doubt appalling. But surely a man like Bryan might make a struggle for his life. Or was it that he felt himself entrapped by a fatality whose blind instrument could no more fail to effect its behest than the earth can fail to revolve upon its axis?—felt that his hour was come, and that not this man only, but mankind, and nature, and God Himself, were leagued against him, to crush him out of life, and hide him for ever from earth and air and sun. Certain it is that, could Bryan have persuaded himself that Jack recognised him, or was conscious of the deed he was doing, he would have found force for resistance. But to be confronted thus by this familiar, yet unknowing, face, overwhelmed him with a terror of loneliness beyond hope; it seemed as if he were irretrievably forgotten by all that was human in the world. And Madeleine—would she forget him too? At the thought, with an energy drawn from some source beyond despair, and with a frenzy of effort that almost burst the arteries of his body, he freed himself from that grasp of destiny and staggered dizzily back. But it was too late; his feet trod upon air; he plunged downwards into the blackness and was gone.

We must follow him, however. The blank of insensibility wore itself out at last, and he awoke, in the smothering darkness, to a dull agony of pain. At first he fancied he was alone; but it was not so. As he strove to move, and sank back with a groan, more helpless than an infant, he was aware of something, or some one, crouching close beside him, and breathing on his face. Was it a human being? and, if so, was it a friend or an enemy? An enemy! Could he, lying here in this pit of night, drawing every feeble breath in torture, have an enemy? Yet, on the other hand, whence was he to expect a friend? Shattered in body and spirit, he could not endure the suspense.

'Who is it?' he whispered.

'Ah, master,' answered a voice that made the dying man's heart shudder, 'not dead, master, not dead, a'ter all! 'A thought the devil wouldn't take yer yet, wi'out a good-bye to Tom. Are ye bad hurt, master?'

'I'm dying. Let me alone, you devil!'

'Not dying—not dying, really, be you, master? 'A set house afire to save ye—ye would not come down to die here on the sly! Why, master, we've much to do yet, we have. Rouse up, master, rouse ye, man! 'A'll never leave ye, never, never! Ye won't answer? Not answer Tom when he speaks to ye? Are you him as thrashed the best man o' Bideford? Shame on ye!'

As this stimulus produced no effect on its subject, Tom seized him by the arm and attempted to drag him to his feet. The only result was an irrepressible moan of anguish, and the body fell back helplessly, like a dead weight. Perceiving that matters were actually at so serious a pass, Tom's purpose and manner underwent a change. All hope of putting into execution any further devices for Bryan's

spiritual destruction were manifestly at an end; it only remained, therefore, to consummate the matter physically; and Bryan's utterly defenceless condition rendered this especially practicable. But there was no time to be lost, else death would be beforehand with him. Tom felt in his pocket and brought out a large clasp-knife with a heavy horn handle. He did not open it, but grasped it as one would hold the handle of a screwdriver. Then having groped about in the darkness until he had satisfied himself as to the exact position of his victim's head, he lay down beside him, passed one arm round and under his neck, and with the other hand applied the butt of the knife-handle to the hollow of Bryan's temple. No one was near to listen to the victim's quavering shrieks, or the insane torturer's giggling taunts and jeers. . . . . It could not last long. Let us leave them there.

When Jack found that Apollyon had vanished—whither he knew not—he also found himself returning to his proper senses. He had no conception where he was, or how he came there; but having some experience of such predicaments, he was not so much surprised at being in his present situation as desirous to get out of it. The fire had been extinguished, and the darkness was relieved only by some moonbeams that fell through a gap in the roof overhead. He felt his way among various half-distinguished obstacles, mounted a few steps, got into a narrow corridor, and saw a perpendicular line of light coming through the crack of a door. He laid his hand against the door and it yielded to his touch. He went in.

There were three or four persons in the room, some of whom he may or may not have known; he did not look at them. What he saw was a low ottoman placed against the wall at the right, and on it, her head supported on a cushion, a young woman was lying, in strange eastern splendour of attire, with golden bracelets on her arms, and a golden chain round her neck. Her face, which had the colour of ivory, was margined with dense black hair; her eyes, which seemed of fathomless depth, were pregnant with solemn meditation. There was in her aspect a certain faintness and a tremulous languor that invested her with sanctity. There is, sometimes, a medicine in death that bestows oblivion upon experience, and purifies those whom it is about to claim with the innocence of childhood.

She greeted Jack with a look, and with the utter absence of surprise characteristic of persons who have begun to breathe the wonders of the world to come. Only a delicate light of contentment brightened softly through her countenance. The sin that she had committed, in casting back the gift of mortal existence entrusted to her, did not weigh upon her at this moment. The action of the poison injected into her veins by the golden asp was smooth and gentle, causing life to ripple gradually away, like little waves from a spot where a pebble has been dropped in smooth water. Jack knelt down beside the couch, and took one of her cold smooth hands in his.

'It is as it was before, Jack,' said she, in a low murmur. 'The cave, you know, after the noise and fire of the explosion. But I know you now: we are cousins, Jack. Isn't it funny that we should have fought each other so for the estates, when, if we had only known—— The tragedy is acted; you must be sorry; but a noble kind of sorry—do you remember?'

'I love you, Madeleine,' said Jack.

'I have been an actress,' she answered slowly, 'and I forgot myself in my part. Now it is over, I can see how it might have been otherwise. Let us put all these years away, and begin as a boy and girl again. Have you my keepsake?'

'Here.'

'And I yours—see: fastened to this gold chain. I have always worn it, even at my wickedest; but I never was wicked enough to have to leave it off. Ah—I do feel so sleepy, Jack. Will you take care of me, and wake me up?'

'Will you love me, when you awake?'

'Yes: but first—remember what I told you, in the cave. You must go round the world—and become famous—and—I will go to my estates, and keep them—for you. That is what all knights and ladies must do. You may kiss my hand. Farewell!'

The fire at the theatre, and the somewhat mysterious death of the new actress, was the main topic of conversation at the Grandison Club and elsewhere for several days.

'What is Castlemere going to do?' some one asked Fred Beauchamp.

'There's no telling what such a fellow as he will do,' Fred replied, shaking his head thoughtfully. 'He doesn't care anything about our style of thing, you know—never did.'

'*Blasé*, is he?' put in the man-of-the-world, lighting a cigar.

'Don't know what you mean by *blasé*. He cares for something better than dinners and racing and having a nap in the House. He told me once he'd a mind to go to California, and do something for the Indians—get 'em properly treated, and that sort of thing. But I fancy,' added Fred, lowering his voice, 'he's awfully cut up about—his cousin, you know. There was a lawsuit about the estates——'

'It didn't amount to anything,' said the man-of-the-world. 'That fellow Caliper got it settled. Clever chap, Caliper, but awful cad. They say Clanroy kicked him.'

'Well, what I was going to say,' continued Fred, 'Castlemere and Madeleine Vivian had met when they were children, but afterwards, when this row came on, neither of 'em knew the other was the same person—d'ye know what I mean? If they had, it would have gone very differently—at least, that's my idea. Fancy a fellow in love with a girl, and hunting her all over the world, and finding her at last just when she was dying, by Jove! And then to find that they'd been enemies half the time, and making each other unhappy, without

knowing it. It's awfully rough, I say! And I was such an idiot, I thought all the while he was going to take the Mayfair.'

'What the deuce ails the Mayfair? Can't make her out lately,' observed some one.

'She and that Mrs. Roland have become great cronies,' said the man-of-the-world. 'Likely they're up to some mischief—a couple of good-looking widows! By the bye, hasn't Castlemere got a little girl, or something?'

'What about her?' said Beauchamp.

'Well, now I think of it, some one told me they were going to take charge of the child's education—that was the phrase, I believe. Won't undertake to say what it means. I suppose while Castlemere's off protecting the American savages——'

'Just oblige me by not making any of your insinuations against my friend Castlemere,' interfered Fred Beauchamp, in a grand tone. 'He's the finest sort of man I ever met; and whether or not he ever does anything that the world hears about, he's got the qualities in him, by Jove, without which no man was ever good or great.'

'He's a fool, for all that, in my opinion,' muttered the man-of-the-world to himself.

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